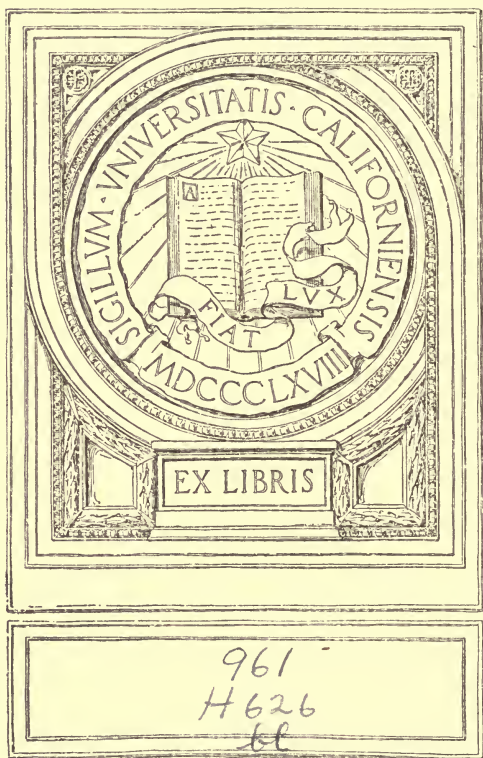


THE BLACK SPANIEL



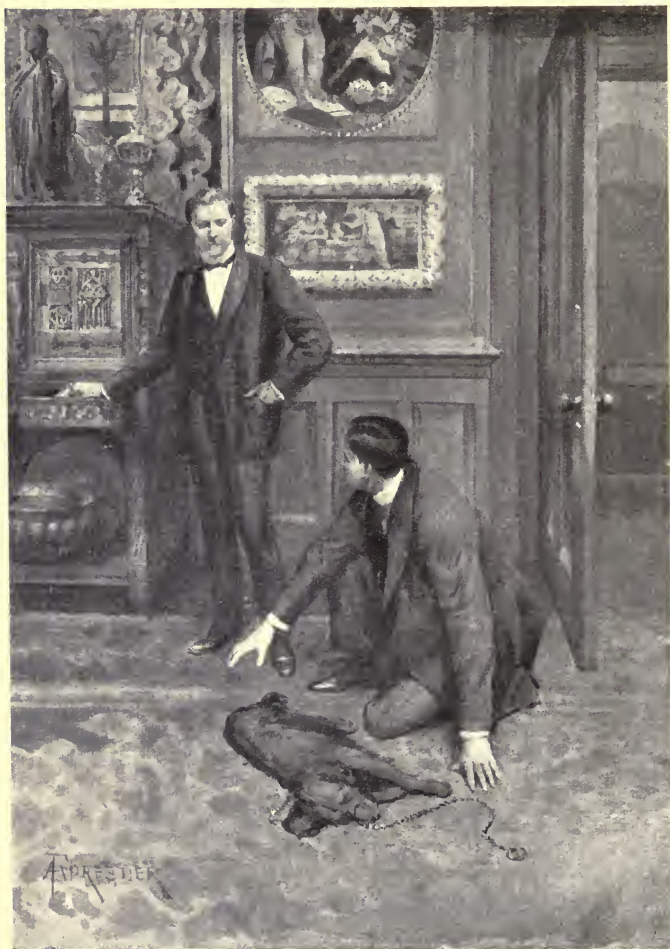
ROBERT HICHENS

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THE BLACK SPANIEL





"MURDERER!" I SAID, "MURDERER!"

THE BLACK SPANIEL

And Other Stories

BY
ROBERT HICHENS

Author of "The Garden of Allah," "The Woman
With the Fan," "Felix," etc.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY
A. FORESTIER



THE
BLACK SPANIEL
AND OTHER STORIES

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PART I—THE DEATH

I

IN the big hall of the Grand Hotel at Rome I introduced Peter Deeming to Vernon Kersteven.

The two men were friends of mine, and I wanted them to like each other; and, perhaps because they were both fond of me, I thought that they would get on well together, and that we should form a happy and a lively trio at dinner. Was this the fancy of an egoist? I have sometimes wondered since.

At the time I speak of I had known Deeming for over two years, having met him first in London at a friend's house. Vernon was a comparatively recent acquaintance whom I had encountered when I was travelling in Algeria; but already in my heart I gave him the dearer title, for I had come to like him greatly, and I knew that my sympathy was returned.

The two men were very different—in their appearance, their natures, their ways of life—but differences sometimes seem to make for pleasant intercourse, and even for intimacy. We often love ourselves; but do we generally love those who markedly resemble us?

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Vernon usually spent his winters in Rome, where he had a delightful house on the Trinità dei Monti. Deeming had come from England to take a long holiday, as his health had partially broken down from overwork. He was a very successful London doctor, devoted to his profession. Vernon was a rich man, passionately interested in the arts and in travel. How well I remember that first evening we spent together, that—I had almost written fatal evening! We were dining in the restaurant, and directly I had made my friends known to each other we went in and sat down at our table, which was in the middle of the room.

Deeming was a very thin man, nearly forty, clean shaven, with iron-grey thick hair, narrow clear-cut features, and a tremendously decisive mouth and chin, betokening power and resolution. His face was pale, and bore traces of his recent illness. In his long, rather colourless grey eyes, penetrating and usually calm, one could see the slightly anxious and irritable expression of a man whose nerves had been, and still were, overwrought. His hands were delicate, with thin fingers curving backward perceptibly at the tips. He leaned forward as he sat in his chair, glancing over the crowd of English, Americans, and foreigners who were busily eating and talking round us.

Vernon was tall and fair, younger than Deeming by some five or six years, with medi-

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tative, almost gentle, and very kind brown eyes, a sensitive, though not handsome, face, with a clear boyish colour in it, a voice that was generally low unless he got much interested in the subject he was discussing, and an extremely fascinating manner, whose fascination sprang from his great courtesy, combined with a perfectly natural self-possession, as of a man who seldom thought about himself, and who was desirous of making things go easily and pleasantly for those with whom he was brought into contact.

I saw Deeming look at him steadily, rather as a doctor looks at a new patient, more than once as we drank our soup, and I knew that with his invariable acuteness he was taking stock of his new acquaintance. Vernon, on the other hand, showed at first no special interest in Deeming, did not regard him earnestly, but was gracefully agreeable to him as he was to everyone. He was far more what is generally called a man of the world than Deeming, whose devotion to, and great success in, his profession had kept him bound to the wheel of work in London, and had prevented him from having the opportunity of knowing the nations and mixing perpetually with society which Vernon had enjoyed.

At first we talked quietly, almost languidly, of Rome, of its changes and its tourists, of the influence of America upon its society, of its climate, of the differences between life in

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England and life abroad, and so forth. It was not till the middle of dinner that anything occurred to wake us up into great animation. Then a stout, dark, and very vivacious little lady, with a commanding air, came into the restaurant followed by two men, and sat down at a table near us. She and her companions were obviously Italians, and almost directly she screwed up her eyes at Vernon and nodded to him. He returned her salute with *empressement*.

"Would you mind telling me who that lady is?" said Deeming.

"Margherita Terrascalchi," replied Vernon.

"What — the famous authoress?" I said. "The writer of 'Pietà'?"

"Yes."

Deeming stared hard at the little lady, who was beginning to eat with extraordinary, almost comical, gusto.

"I have read that book," he said. "In a translation."

"What do you think of it?" asked Vernon.

"No doubt it is well done and calculated to move the ordinary reader."

"Only the ordinary reader?" said Vernon, with a slight upward movement of his eyebrows.

"I think it wrongheaded and sentimental," said Deeming, with more energy than he had



"SHE AND HER COMPANIONS WERE OBVIOUSLY ITALIANS."

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yet shown. "She appears to wish to elevate the animals above humanity, to take them out of their proper place."

"What would you say is their proper place?"

"They are in the world, in my opinion, to be the servants of humanity, to minister to our comfort, our pleasure, our necessities, to help to increase our knowledge and satisfy our appetites, to give us ease and to gain us money. Don't you think so?"

"No doubt many scientists, many sportsmen, and most, if not all, butchers do."

I laughed.

"But you, Vernon," I said, "are neither scientist, sportsman, nor butcher, and Deeming asks you what you think."

Vernon was looking less tranquil, less gentle than usual at this moment. His face was lit up by a fire I had never seen burning in his eyes before.

"My sympathies march with Madame Ter-rascalchi's," he answered, "though perhaps she expresses them with a feminine enthusiasm that may seem to some almost hysterical, and is carried away by her passion of pity into an excess of animosity against men and women, who often err against the animal world more from lack of imagination than from any definite bias towards cruelty."

"The question is, are we to be the servants of the animals or they to be our servants?"

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Deeming said rather drily. "I notice that Madame Terrascalchi is eating something that looks remarkably like a veal cutlet at this very moment."

"Oh," said Vernon, with his pleasant smile. "I hold no brief for her. I believe her, in fact, to be very—shall I say human? But as to what you were saying. Is it wholly a matter of whether we are to be masters or slaves? Cannot we and the animals—we are not, of course, discussing dangerous wild beasts—be friends, or, let us say, could we not be friends, good and close friends, they serving us in their way, we serving them in ours?"

"How are we to serve the animals?" asked Deeming, still drily.

"By considering them far more than we generally do, by studying them, their natures, habits, desires, likes and dislikes far more closely, by encouraging their affection for us, and giving them more of ours."

"I think that would be a great waste of time."

"Deeming is a terribly busy man, Vernon," I said.

"I know my London well enough to know it," Vernon remarked politely. "Still, I think we might find time for that; even that we ought to find time for it. I am rather what you might call a 'crank' on the subject of the animal world."

"I didn't know it," I said.

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“ Oh, yes, I am.”

The almost fierce light again shone in his eyes.

“ I love all animals. Ouida speaks of their ‘ mysterious lives,’ spent side by side with ours, and comparatively little noticed, little sympathised with by us. I know that many animal-lovers would raise a cry of protest against this. ‘ Look,’ they would say, ‘ how dogs are worshipped and petted, how horses are loved by their owners, how cats are stroked and fondled!’ and so forth. Yes, it is true. Out of the great world of the animals, we—those of us who are fond of animals—select a few who, we think, can minister to our pleasure, and we give them, or think we give them, a good time. But these pet animals who enjoy life are few in number compared with the many who are made to suffer by man; the dogs that are kept everlastingly tied up, or are half-starved, or are perpetually cuffed and kicked and beaten; the cats that are abandoned to die when their thoughtless owners change home; the horses that are overdriven, tortured by tight bearing-reins, lashed with the whip, made to draw loads that are too heavy for them; the birds—let me include them—that are forced to spend their lives in tiny cages in dark places. To any real, observant lover of animals, even of the so-called pet animals—excluding the beasts of burden, donkeys, mules, oxen, and the beasts that form part of our food supply,

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and the dumb creatures that are given over to the tender mercies of the sportsman: the hares that are coursed, the foxes and stags and deer that are hunted, the pigeons that are let out of traps (their eyes pierced to make them fly in a given direction) to be shot and are often left maimed to die, the sea-birds that the Cockney 'wings' and abandons to starve and rot, floating helpless on the waves of the sea, the pheasants that, wounded in a battue, are crushed one on the top of the other into bags to perish of suffocation; excluding all these—to any real and observant lover of animals the lack of sympathy, or the actual cruelty of man, is a perpetual source of disturbance, of anxiety, even of lively distress and misery.”

I was quite amazed at the energy with which Vernon had spoken, at the vigour and force of his manner. He paused for a moment, then he added—

“My love of animals has given me very many horrible moments in my life, moments in which I confess that my heart has been turned to bitterness and I have longed to make men suffer as they were making animals suffer. Yes, I have longed to see the cursed Cockney sportsman drifting face to face with a lingering death upon the sea, the callous game-preserved wounded in one of his traps and alone in the darkness of night in the forest, the careless hunter at bay with hounds rushing in upon him. But especially have I

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known the longing to turn one whom I have seen being cruel to a pet animal into that animal, and to be his master for a little while. You know some hold that theory."

"What theory?" said Deeming.

"That what we do is eventually done to us in another life; for instance, that if a man has been brutal to an animal, at death his soul passes into a similar animal, which endures the fate he once meted out when he was a man."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Deeming. "You surely can't believe such unscientific nonsense!"

"I did not say I believed it, but I should not be sorry to."

He sipped his champagne. Then, more lightly, he said—

"I told you I was a bit of a crank. I am even hand-in-glove with Arthur Gernham."

At the mention of this name, Deeming moved, and I saw his eyes flash.

"The prominent anti-vivisectionist?" he said.

"Yes."

"And you share his views?"

"To a considerable extent, though I don't always approve of what he writes or of what he says."

"I'm glad of that. We doctors, you know, ab—well, we don't love that eager gentleman. If he had his way humanity would undoubt-

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edly suffer far more in the future than it will. For I don't think his sentimentalities and wild exaggerations will ever gain over our legislators to his views."

"Perhaps not. But I sometimes wonder whether anyone has the right, whether anyone was intended by the Creator to have the right, to avoid suffering at the cost of inflicting it, even to save life by causing death. However, the vivisection question is hardly a pleasant one for the dinner-table, eh!"

There was a moment's silence. Then Deeming said—

"Of course you never shoot or hunt?"

"Never."

"I do," I said. "But I am not such a contemptible hypocrite as to deny that cruelty, and often very gross cruelty, enters into sport."

Deeming slightly smiled.

"Do you keep any pets?" said Vernon to him, rather sharply.

"Yes. I have a dog at home, a black spaniel; and you?"

"No. For years I have kept no animals. I shall never keep one again."

"That surprises me. You would give them a remarkably good time, I feel sure."

"I have a reason."

"May I ask what it is?"

"Certainly. I once had a dog that I—that I cared about. She was out with me one day

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in London and disappeared. I made every possible inquiry, offered a reward, went to the Dogs' Home, but I couldn't find her. Eventually, through an odd chain of circumstances that I needn't trouble you with, I learnt her fate."

"What was it?" I asked.

"She had been picked up by a dog-stealer and sold to the proprietor of an establishment called 'Lilac Hall,' near London."

"An establishment?" I said, struck by the tone in which he had uttered the words.

"Where a large number—stock, I'll say—of animals of all kinds, horses, cats, rabbits, guinea-pigs, dogs, was kept on hand for scientific purposes. My companion and friend died under the knife of the vivisector. What do you think of the food here? They've got a new *chef*."

"I—I—oh, it's very good, I think; it's excellent."

Deeming seemed startled by the sudden change of topic, and when we went into the hall to smoke he tried to return to the discussion. But Vernon did not rise to the bait he threw out, and at last frankly said—

"You'd much better not get me on to the subject of animals. I am really a bore when I let myself loose, as I did at dinner. And I am quite sure you"—and he met Deeming's eyes—"don't agree with my views. Are you staying long in Rome?"

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“Till I feel quite set up again and ready for work.”

“Then I’ll hope you’ll come and see me.”

He gave his card to Deeming, and soon after went away.

I felt sure he had asked Deeming to call in order to please me. My two friends, I feared, had not taken a fancy to each other. One curious thing struck me as I watched Vernon’s tall figure going out through the doorway to the street. It was this—that I knew a side of Vernon’s, and a side of Deeming’s character that had been hitherto completely concealed from me. Each had elicited a frankness from the other that I, of whom they were fond, had not been able to bring forth.

Their two enmities—so I thought of it—had clashed together and struck out sparks of truth.

By the way, Vernon’s last remark to me in the outer hall of the hotel, whither I had accompanied him, leaving Deeming in the winter-garden, was this—

“I shouldn’t care to be Deeming’s black spaniel.”

II

A DAY or two afterwards Deeming said to me, "I'm going to call on your friend Vernon this afternoon. When is he likely to be in?"

"He's generally at home between six and seven," I said. After a moment I added, "You want to find him then?"

"Why—yes. He's a very agreeable fellow. Did you think I disliked him?"

"Disliked him—no, hardly that. But, somehow, I scarcely fancied you two were quite in sympathy the other night."

"Oh, you mean that animal-versus-human-being discussion. Now it is just because of that I want to meet him again."

"To win him over to your views?"

"Well, I confess that I should like to get him to see how harmful such a man as his friend Gernham is or may become to the world—of men understood. He's probably got all kinds of absurd notions as to how vivisection is carried on. I should like to have a quiet, reasonable talk with him."

"Go to-day, then, at six. You're almost sure to find him."

"I will."

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And Deeming set his lips together with determination.

I was, I confess, a little curious as to the result of the interview. I heard something about it the same evening from Vernon, who sent round a note asking me to dine with him alone.

"Your friend Deeming has been here," he said, almost directly I was in the house.

"I know. Did you have a pleasant time?"

"He's extremely intelligent—got a great deal of character, real force. That ruthless mouth and chin of his tell the truth."

At this moment the servant said that dinner was ready. We continued our conversation in the dining-room, which was hung with sacred pictures, gentle-eyed Madonnas—one by Luni—Saints, an Agony in the Garden by an unnamed painter, the little children coming to Christ, the Magi offering their gifts, watched by calm-eyed beasts in a dim stable.

"Yes," I said. "Deeming is very decisive."

"To me there's something very strange in the thought that he is a healer."

"Why?"

"Well—do you mind my speaking frankly about a friend of yours?"

"Not a bit."

"I shall startle you, perhaps. You know one reads sometimes in the papers of people who are afflicted with what is called the mania

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to persecute. There was a trial of a woman not long ago—a Mrs. Denby.”

“I know. But——”

“And there have been various instances in distant Colonial possessions of France and Belgium—and, perhaps, of other countries—various instances of men placed practically in the position of tyrants who have indulged in orgies of persecution of natives.”

“But, my dear Vernon, you surely don’t mean that you think Deeming has the blood-lust because he believes good can come of vivisection. Upon my word, if you don’t take care, I shall begin to think you really are a crank.”

“It isn’t that. It isn’t what the man says. I can quite understand that as a doctor he wishes by every means to advance the spread of medical knowledge. No, no; it’s the man himself. Do you know him well?”

“I have seen a good deal of him in London. Not a great deal, because he’s such a busy man. But I have often been with him.”

“Often in his house?”

“More often at his club, and in my own house and at restaurants. Being a bachelor, when he entertains he nearly always does so at Claridge’s, or the Savoy, or one of those places. But, of course, I have been in his house.”

“Have you ever seen his dog, that black spaniel he spoke of?”

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"No, I can't remember that I have."

For a moment Vernon spoke of a certain dish that had just been brought in, a special *plat* for which his cook was famous. Then he said—

"That dog I spoke of the other night—the dog I lost—you remember?"

"Yes."

"She was a black spaniel."

His tone in saying this was so peculiar that I was misled and exclaimed: "But you told us the poor beast was killed in that house—in Lilac Hall!"

"So she was."

"I thought—really, by the way you spoke, you led me to imagine that perhaps you fancied Deeming had got possession of your dog."

"Oh, dear no! Whisper is dead, years ago. I seldom speak of her."

"I never heard you mention her till the other night."

"The other night I showed you a side of me that you had never suspected the existence of, didn't I?"

"You did indeed."

"Well, having broken through my reserve, I feel that I don't mind being frank with you."

His eyes began to shine as they had shone in the restaurant when he spoke of man's cruelty to animals.

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“My dog was the greatest solace in my life,” he said. “I am not a sentimental fool. There is nothing either sentimental or foolish in loving that which, with a whole heart and perfectly, loves you. And a dog’s devotion really is one of the most perfect, one of the most touching, and one of the most complete sentiments that can be manifested by one living creature to another. Not to respond to it would be absolutely devilish. But one can’t help oneself if one isn’t made of stone. I won’t bore you with a long account of Whisper’s devotion and fidelity. Why should I? It’s enough to say that she loved me as much as a dog can love, and in a dog’s way, with absolute unselfishness, with entire singleheartedness. I never felt lonely when she was with me, scarcely ever even dull. When I had been out without her, and, on my return, she met me at the door, almost hysterically eager to show her rapture, I—well, I was glad to be alive, and felt that life was worth while so long as I could evoke such a tempest of delight in any living creature. A faithful dog, believe me, is the best bulwark against the coming of cynicism. You can’t be a cynic when a dog’s cold nose is pushed into your hand, or a dog’s paw is placed gently and solemnly upon your knee. When I lost Whisper, when I found out what had been her fate, I felt something that was more than grief”—he leaned over the table and laid his hand on my arm—“I felt

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hatred, burning hatred, against those who had snared and murdered her, against all who use animals cruelly for the purposes of men."

His face was transformed. I seemed to see before me a man whom I had never seen before. This man, I felt, could be not only gentle, but vindictive, and would be quite capable of expressing himself not only in words, but also through actions.

"I can understand your bitterness," I said. "But does not this recalling of a painful event only stir up recollections that——?"

He interrupted me almost roughly.

"That doesn't matter at all. I want to tell you now. I prefer to."

"Go on, then," I said.

He took his hand from my arm, and continued—

"The fate of my companion altered me. It either stirred from sleep, or actually woke into life, a fierceness that till then I had not known existed, or could exist, in me. It made me understand that, in certain circumstances and to certain people, I could be implacable, almost ferocious; that I could deny the sole right of Providence—you know the text: why quote it?—to administer that gorgeous justice we name vengeance; that I could stand up and exclaim, 'I will repay,' and repay without fear, without flinching, and even to the uttermost farthing. But that was not all it did to me. With this awakening, or this cre-

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ation of fierceness in me, there came a deepening of pity, of tenderness for the slaves of man. Yet I was selfish, and I have remained selfish."

"How?" I asked, wondering.

"It was, and is, in my power to make at least some animals happy, as I had made my dead dog happy. I could not, and cannot, bring myself to do that. I feared and I fear too much to suffer again as I suffered when I lost Whisper, and when I learnt the truth about her end. That end has been a nightmare to me ever since. I cannot think of it even now without torture."

"My dear fellow," I said. "Don't dwell upon it. To do so is really morbid."

"I don't dwell upon it, as a rule. Have I ever even mentioned this subject to you before?"

"No, no. But——"

"That man, your friend Deeming, has roused me up. I—I tell you that I hate—that it is almost unbearable to me to think of his having a dog—a black spaniel, like Whisper—in his power."

He said the last words with extraordinary vehemence.

"That was what you meant then!" I exclaimed.

"When you mistook me just now? Yes, that!"

He relapsed into silence, but kept his still

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glowing eyes fixed upon me. I seemed to read in them that he had more to tell me, to see that there was some project, some intention of action, blazing in his mind.

"Look here, Vernon," I said, determined to be quite frank with him at whatever cost, "Deeming is a friend of mine."

"I know."

"That being so, I don't think you can expect me to be ready to harbour foul suspicions of him without any reason for them being ad-duced. If he were to be suspicious of you, and told me so, I should speak to him as I speak to you now. What on earth has the man done or said to make you so violent—yes, my dear friend, that is the word—against him?"

He did not look angry at my energy, but, on the other hand, he did not look doubtful or disposed towards modification. He only said, "How well do you know Deeming?"

"Not very intimately, but well enough to feel sure that he is a humane man. Patients of his have spoken to me of him, of his skill, his care, and devotion in the highest terms."

"I don't doubt it. I don't doubt that he is humane as a doctor. Anyone can see that he is devoted to his profession, and his profession is to heal human suffering. Ambition alone would cause him to be humane—as a doctor."

"You said yourself you were a bit of a

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crank. Aren't you ever afraid that your crankiness may lead you—now do forgive me!—into something approaching malice?”

I thought he might be angry, but he wasn't.

“My intuition—apart from anything else,” he said—“my intuition tells me that Deeming is a cruel man.”

“I don't believe it. Vivisection——”

“I'm not thinking of that now. What I am thinking is that I should like to see Deeming's dog.”

“That wouldn't be difficult, I imagine.”

“You don't mean that she is with him here, in Rome?”

“Oh no. A dog in a hotel is apt to be a nuisance.”

“I don't agree with you.”

“Well, well; but you always come to London in the late summer. I suppose you'll do so this year?”

“Probably.”

“Call on Deeming. He's a hospitable man, and if you entertain him here in Rome, he is sure to ask you out in London. There you can see for yourself whether his dog isn't properly treated, as I'll swear she is, and as happy as dog can be.”

I spoke lightly, even with a deliberately jocosely and chaffing air. He listened to me gravely.

“I will invite Deeming here,” he said. “In-

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deed, I intended to in any case, as he is a friend of yours."

"Thank you."

"But you say he usually entertains in restaurants when he is in London. I have no reason to think I shall ever set my foot inside his house."

The extreme gravity of his manner, the earnestness of the eyes that were fixed upon me, made me realise how strong was his strange desire, and therefore, how strong was his—as I thought then—absurd and unreasonable suspicion. I might have continued to laugh at it, and chaff him about it, but I did not. Something in his face and manner made me unable to do so, made me suddenly conscious that, however much I laughed, I could never laugh him out of his curious, and surely morbid, anxiety to verify, or lull to rest, his fears. And I must confess—so easily are we influenced by certain convinced people whom we care for—that I, too, was becoming, at that moment, oddly interested in this matter of Deeming and his black spaniel. Why had I never seen the dog, never heard Deeming mention it till the other night?

"If Deeming doesn't invite you to his house," I said, changing my tone, "there's a very easy method of getting into it."

"What method?" said Vernon eagerly.

"Go to him as a patient."

I had scarcely said the words before I felt

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uncomfortable, almost traitorous. Here was I entering into something that was like a plot with one friend to get at a knowledge of another which that other had never voluntarily tendered to me. I was angry with myself.

"Upon my word, Vernon," I exclaimed, "I'm ashamed of myself! Don't let us discuss this matter any longer. Deeming and you are both my friends, and I wish to act always fairly and squarely by you both."

"What unfairness is there in enabling me to prove the folly and falseness of my suspicions?" he rejoined quickly.

"I know—I know; but—oh, the whole thing is really absurd. It is madness to think such things of a man with no evidence to go upon."

"How do you know that I have no evidence?"

"How can you have any?"

"Are a man's words no evidence? Is his face while he says them no evidence?"

"Did you talk about his dog when he was here this afternoon?" I asked abruptly, moved by a sudden impression that he was keeping something from me.

"He wouldn't talk about her. I am quite certain of one thing."

"What is that?"

"That Deeming wishes now that he had never mentioned to us that he had a dog."

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I suppose I looked incredulous, for he added, without giving me time to speak—

“When you see him again, try to turn the conversation upon the black spaniel, and see how he takes it. And now let us talk of something else.”

During the rest of the evening Deeming and his dog were not mentioned. Vernon resumed, almost like a garment, his old self, the self I had always known, cultured, gentle in manner, full of interest in every topic that lent itself to quiet discussion and amiable debate. The evil spirit—I thought of it as almost that—had departed out of him, and when I got up to go I could hardly believe that I had ever been the recipient of his vehemence, or seen his eyes blazing with the light of scarcely controlled passion. He came with me to the hall-door and let me out into the quiet night.

“Good-bye,” he said, pressing my hand.

“Good-bye,” I answered.

I hesitated. Then I said—

“Doesn’t this calm of the night embracing Rome make you—make you feel that in your suspicions of Deeming you have been unreasonable; that, after all, it is unlikely he should be what you have fancied him to be?”

In an instant all the calmness, all the gentleness went out of his face. But he only answered—

“When you get back to the hotel talk to

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him about his black spaniel, and see how he takes it. Good-night."

Before I could say anything more he had drawn back into his house and shut the door quickly behind him.

III

As I walked back to the Grand Hotel I thought over Vernon's last words and the way in which he had said them. Should I obey his injunctions? I confessed to myself with reluctance that my conversation with him that evening had made me suspicious of a friend. Yet I had Vernon's own word for it that he was a crank on the subject of animals, and my recent experience of him almost forced me to the conclusion that in his nature, usually so gentle, there must be an odd strain of fanaticism. My mind was troubled, and I reached the hotel without coming to a decision as to whether I would speak to Deeming about his dog or not. As I came into the outer hall I saw him through the glass door sitting alone in the winter garden, smoking, with a paper, which he was not reading, lying on his knee. He did not see me, and, for a moment, I watched him with a furtive curiosity of which I was secretly half-ashamed. Perhaps stirred by my gaze, he suddenly looked up, caught sight of me, smiled, and made a slight gesture, as if beckoning me to come in and have a talk. I took off my overcoat and joined him.

"I've just come from Vernon," I said, sitting down and lighting a cigar.



"AS I WALKED BACK, I THOUGHT OVER VERNON'S LAST WORDS."

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“ Ah! ” said Deeming.

He uncrossed his legs, crossed them again, and added:

“ He’s got a beautiful house.”

“ Yes, one of the most beautiful in Rome. He wants you to dine with him one night, I believe. Probably he’ll ask you in a day or two.”

“ Very good of him.”

His voice was scarcely cordial.

“ He’s a curious fellow,” he continued. “ Easy in his manner, but difficult really to know, I fancy.”

“ If you dine with him you may find him less reserved,” I said, rather perfunctorily.

“ I don’t suppose he’ll ask me alone.”

“ Oh, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“ I don’t think he cares much about me,” Deeming continued abruptly. “ Do you? ”

“ My dear fellow, he hardly knows you,” I exclaimed. “ You haven’t been quarrelling over the animal world this afternoon, have you? ”

And I laughed, but without much cordiality, I fear.

“ Did he say we had? ”

“ Good heavens, no! But you differ on the dog question, and so——”

Deeming frowned.

“ The dog question! ” he said. “ Why on earth should you call it that? ”

“ Well, I mean that he’s very sensitive since

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he lost his dog, and that perhaps makes him a little unreasonable at times, though I must say that till the other night when he dined here I never heard him mention the subject of animals and their relation with man. And, by the way, you've been equally silent. Till the other night I never knew you possessed a dog."

"Is it such an important matter that I should go about proclaiming it?"

His tone was suddenly hard and impatient.

"No, of course not."

"I hate people who bother their friends about their pets. It's almost as bad as the women who are always talking about the marvellous beauty and genius of their squalling babies."

He set his lips together as if he never meant to open them again, and I saw a look as of acute nervous irritation in his eyes. It warned me not to persevere in the conversation, and made me vexed with myself for having given way to Vernon's desire.

"Let's have a nightcap," I said. "What do you think of doing to-morrow? What do you say to getting a carriage and driving over to lunch at Tivoli?"

He looked more easy.

"If it is fine I should enjoy it immensely," he said in a calmer voice.

And we talked of old gardens and the beauty of rushing water.

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We spent the following day together at Tivoli. When we came back towards evening, the hall-porter handed to Deeming a note. It was from Vernon, inviting him to dine two days later.

"You see how he hates you!" I said chaffingly when he told me. "Do you mean to go?"

"Oh, yes. Why not?"

He spoke lightly, holding the note open in his hand.

He did not go, however, and for this reason. On the morning of the day he was to dine with Vernon, he left Rome for England. An urgent summons from a patient, he told me, made it necessary for him to go to London without a moment's delay.

I remonstrated with him, but in vain.

"I've had quite enough rest," he said. "I'm all right. And this is an important matter. It means a very large sum of money."

"Health's more than money."

"Certainly, but I feel quite my own man again."

He did not look it, but I said no more.

I knew that argument would be useless. He sent a note to Vernon, and, when I bade him good-bye, begged me to express his regret at being obliged to cancel the dinner.

"But I hope some day he'll come to dine with me in London. Do tell him so," he said, as he stepped into the omnibus to go to

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the station. "I should like to meet him again."

Those were his last words. I repeated them to Vernon.

"I shall not forget that invitation, I assure you," he said quietly. "And I may be able to enjoy Deeming's hospitality sooner than he, perhaps, expects."

"Why? You're surely not going to London yet awhile? I thought you loved your June in Rome better than any other month of the year."

"But I've had so many Junes in Rome that I think I shall make a change. By the way, when will you be in London?"

"Oh, certainly by the last week in April."

"If I asked to travel back with you, would you object to my company?"

"My dear fellow! Of course I should be delighted."

"Let us consider it a bargain, then."

He spoke decisively, and shook me by the hand as if to clinch the bargain. Nor did he forget it.

The third week in April found us in Paris, and on the twenty-second of that month we stepped into the *rapide* at the Gare du Nord, bound for England.

We sat opposite to one another in the compartment, with, at first, ramparts of London papers between us; but, as we drew near to Boulogne, first Vernon's rampart fell, and

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then mine. The thought of the nearness of England had got hold of us both. London ideas were taking possession of us, and, as the train rushed on towards the sea, we became restless, as if the roar of the great city were already in our ears.

"Do you know," I said, breaking our mutual silence, "that, familiar as I am with London, I can never return to it after an absence without a feeling of apprehension. It always seems to me that in its black and smoky arms it must hold some disaster which it is waiting to give to me."

"I've had that sensation, too," said Vernon. "Among the cities of the world London is the monster, not merely by right of size but by other, and more mysterious rights. It affects my imagination more than any of the European capitals, but rather frightfully than agreeably. I feel that it is the city of adventure, but that every adventure there must have a fearsome ending."

"No doubt we are affected by its climate and its atmosphere."

"I dare say. Still, if anything very strange, very uncommon, should ever happen to me, I am quite sure that it will be in London."

I smiled.

"My experience," I said, "has been that in London I am perpetually expectant of gloomy and mysterious events, but that my life there is remarkably unromantic and commonplace."

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"You speak almost regretfully. Do you wish for gloomy and mysterious events in your life?"

"I suppose not. Yet there is a spirit hidden in one which does sigh plaintively for the strange."

"Perhaps this time it will be gratified."

Something in the tone of his voice moved me to say—

"Do you expect it to be gratified?"

"I! Why should I?"

"I don't know. Something in your voice made me fancy that you did."

He laughed.

"The London atmosphere is, perhaps, affecting me already," he said. "The London influence is taking hold of me. I told you it always stirred my imagination."

"At Boulogne-sur-mer!" I said, as the train ran into the station. "The monster's arms are longer than Goliath's!"

The stoppage of the train interrupted our conversation. We got out to stretch our legs for a moment, and as we did so I found myself wondering why Vernon, generally a very frank man, at any rate with me, should have met my plain question with an attempt at laughing subterfuge. It was a very slight matter, of course. In another man I should, perhaps, scarcely have noticed it. But it was not Vernon's way, and therefore it struck me. I felt that he wished to prevent me from get-

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ting at the truth of his mind at this moment. Usually, his desire certainly was that the truth of his mind should be known to me.

We travelled to Calais in silence. Then came the bustle of going aboard the steamer and fortifying ourselves against the painful attentions of a sharp north-easterly wind. When we were established in our deck-chairs, and closely wrapped in rugs, we glanced round to see whether we had any acquaintances among our fellow-passengers. The steamer was just casting off, and some, like ourselves, were already settled down for the voyage, while others were tramping up and down briskly, with an air of determination, as if bent upon making their blood circulate, and getting the maximum of benefit out of the crossing. Among the latter was an elderly man, with pepper-and-salt hair and a thin, aristocratic face.

"Hullo," I said, "there's Lord Elyn. I wonder where he's come from."

Turning in his walk, he was in front of us almost as I said the words, and, seeing me, stopped, and, bending down, shook my hand.

"Where do you hail from?" he asked.

"Paris," I answered. "I've been in Rome. And you?"

"Calais."

"You've been staying at Calais?"

"No. I'm here for my medicine. I live on the Channel at present, or nearly. My

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doctor, Peter Deeming—he'll be Sir Peter before long, I suppose—has prescribed the double voyage, from Dover and back, every day of the week for a month. I sleep at the Burlington and eat *bœuf-à-la-mode* at the Calais buffet every midday of my life just now."

"Deeming's a friend of mine—of ours," I said. "May I introduce Mr. Kersteven—Lord Elyn."

The two men bowed.

"It's a pity he doesn't take his own medicine," said Lord Elyn. "I've tried to persuade him, but in vain so far. However, I've got his promise to come down to-night—Saturday, you know—and stay till Monday, and make the voyage with me to-morrow. I expect to find him at the Burlington when I get back."

I saw a sharp look of eagerness come into Vernon's face.

"Is Deeming looking ill, Lord Elyn?" he asked. "You say it is a pity he doesn't take the medicine he prescribes for you."

"I think him looking very ill—pale and worried and played out. He is too great a success and pays the penalty—works too hard, like most successful men. He ought to have prolonged his holiday in Rome. I can't imagine why he hurried back to town so unexpectedly."

"Oh," I said, "I can explain that. He

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was summoned to town by an important patient."

"Really!" said Lord Elyn. "I never heard of it."

He sounded slightly incredulous.

"I saw him almost directly he arrived," he added; "and when I inquired why he had shortened his trip to Italy, he merely told me that he was all right and had got sick of doing nothing."

"Well," I answered, "he left Rome at a moment's notice, and gave me the reason I told you."

"Oh! Well, then, of course, it was so. A pity for him—though not for us, eh? He's a wonderful doctor. No one like him. And now, if you'll excuse me, I must take exercise. I keep walking the whole time, by command."

He nodded, and went off up the deck at a brisk pace.

"I'm sorry to hear that about Deeming," I said to Vernon.

"Yes. It's a pity he was called away from Rome."

His voice, too, sounded incredulous.

"Why d'you say it like that?" I asked. "You don't think he told us a lie?"

"Why put it so cruelly? He may have made an excuse. When one receives a boring dinner-invitation, one has sometimes a previous engagement."

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“A dinner-invitation! Surely you don’t —?”

“Well, he was to have dined with me the night of the day he left. But, of course, it may have been a pure coincidence.”

Lord Elyn passed us again, and repassed.

“I say, Luttrell,” Vernon added, “what do you say to one more night out of London? What do you say to a night at the Burlington?”

“At Dover?”

“Yes.”

“But the luggage! It’s all registered through.”

“We’ve got our dressing-cases, and my man has a bag with my pyjamas. Evening dress doesn’t matter for a night. I’m sure the Burlington will forgive us, especially if we engage a sitting-room.”

“Oh, yes, that doesn’t matter.”

“What do you say, then?”

“I don’t know that I mind, but—what’s made you think of it all of a sudden? Have you taken a violent fancy to Lord Elyn?”

My voice was challenging. He only smiled quietly.

“A very violent fancy. I like obedient men.”

Lord Elyn passed once more with a serious, determined air. He did not look at us. He was intent on his medicine.

“You’re joking.”

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“ So were you.”

I laughed.

“ Of course. You don’t choose to tell me your reason for wishing to stop at Dover? ”

“ I think you’ve guessed it.”

He unrolled the rug from his legs and got up.

“ I’m going to take some medicine, too. Think over the Burlington and tell me presently.”

In a moment I saw him join Lord Elyn, and they walked up and down together, talking busily.

Of course, I had “ guessed it.” He wanted to meet Deeming again, to meet him directly we landed in England. My previous suspicion—it had been almost more than a suspicion—was confirmed. I felt positive now that Vernon had cut short his stay in Rome, given up his June there, in order to follow Deeming to London and try to see more of him. The obsession of the black spaniel—I called it that now in my mind for the first time—was still upon him, had been upon him ever since the night when I had made my two friends acquainted with each other in the winter garden of the Grand Hotel. And Deeming? Had he really invented an imaginary patient in order to have a good excuse for leaving Rome and so avoiding Vernon’s dinner? If that were so, then I was assisting at a sort of man-hunt, in which two of my friends were pursued and

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pursuer. I began to feel as if I were going to be involved in something extraordinary. And yet how vague, how fantastic it all was! And my own position? I tried to review it. If I assisted Vernon in any way, could I be called—or rather, should I be, that was the only thing that mattered—disloyal to Deeming? I felt rather uncomfortable, and yet—and this was strange—rather excited. I thought of my conversation with Vernon about London. I had been absent from it for some time, yet already, and on the sea, I felt affected by its powerful and dreadful influence, felt that curious sense of apprehension which I had mentioned to Vernon in the train. Suddenly I resolved to fall in with my friend's wish to stay the night at Dover. After all, what did it matter? He and Deeming would certainly meet in London. Why strive to postpone the meeting? It seemed to me—I was thinking somewhat absurdly, I acknowledge it—that it would be better, safer, that the encounter should take place at Dover, under the white cliffs, with the sea-wind coming in, perhaps, through open windows. London was mephitic, and turned one to gloomy and morbid imaginations. The sea-wind might blow away Vernon's extraordinary suspicions of Deeming, and lay to rest the obsession of the black spaniel.

Moved by this idea, when Vernon presently stopped before me with Lord Elyn, I said—

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“I give my vote for a night at the Burlington.”

“Capital!” said Vernon. “I’ve been telling Lord Elyn we thought of staying, and he is sure our tweeds and coloured ties will be forgiven us.”

IV

AT the Burlington in the hall we found Deeming. I saw him before he was aware of us, and was startled by the change in his face. There was the stamp of nervous exhaustion upon it. The complexion was grey, the mouth was drawn, the eyes were anxious, almost feverish. When he turned and faced us fully he made an abrupt movement which was certainly not caused by pleasure, and I saw the fingers of his two hands clench themselves violently in the palms. Then he recovered himself, came forward, and greeted us with self-possession.

"I never expected to see you in England so soon," he said to Vernon. "I thought you usually spent part of the summer in Rome."

"I often do. But this year something has called me to London."

"Oh. Well, all the better. We shall see something of you. I hope we shall bring off our dinner together in town. Only you must let me be the host."

"Thank you. I shall be delighted."

The note of cordiality was, I thought, forced by both men. Few more words were spoken, for it was getting late, and the hour of dinner was approaching. As we went upstairs I said to Vernon—

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"Deeming does certainly want medicine of one sort or another. Don't you think he looks horribly ill?"

"He has a strung-up expression. I should say he's overworking. Did you notice how he started when he saw us?"

"Did he?" I answered, disingenuously I confess. "Naturally he was surprised. He had no idea we were in England."

"Exactly. Here are our rooms. *Au revoir* at dinner."

The dinner I need not chronicle at length. It took place downstairs, although we had engaged the sitting-room to appease a management shocked at our lack of evening clothes. The talk ran easily enough, helped by Lord Elyn's unconsciousness of the obsession of the black spaniel, which sometimes seemed to me to be hovering about our table, creeping beneath our chairs, a shadow importunate, servile, yet menacing. I felt that the thoughts of Deeming and Vernon, interlacing and inimical, were on this whining, whimpering, uneasy shadow, that had called the latter from his home in Italy, that had stopped him here by the grey sea. I knew it as if those thoughts were spread before me by my plate. And all the time we chatted, glancing from subject to subject without great earnestness, laughing lightly at the last London absurdity, or discussing with apparent animation the chances of politics and the trend of art, I felt that our

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conversation was but a thin veil spread over a depth in which were other voices than ours, murmuring, in which the pale forms of future events glided, like spectres, to and fro.

Directly after dinner Lord Elyn excused himself.

"The eyes of the nurse are upon me," he said, jocosely. "I see them saying: 'Master Elyn, it's time for you to go to bed!' Eh, Deeming?"

"Quite right, Lord Elyn," answered Deeming, smiling.

"Well, good-night. You'd much better come too, Deeming."

"Oh, I couldn't sleep yet. I haven't been on the sea. I think I shall go out and take a breath of air on the front."

"Perhaps it may do you good. I feel full of sleep."

And he went off, leaving us in the hall.

"Will you come out?" asked Deeming.

The invitation seemed addressed to both of us. I expected Vernon to accept it with alacrity, but, to my surprise, he took up the *Westminster Gazette*.

"I'm a bit tired," he answered. "I think I'll stay here."

"I'll come with you," I said.

"Right. I want a turn or two to summon slumber."

There was something almost pathetic in his voice. It moved me to ask, as we went down

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the steps, and along the row of houses to the sea-front—

“Have you been sleeping badly, then?”

“Pretty badly. I say, what’s brought Vernon over so soon?”

The question was sharply suspicious.

“He didn’t tell me,” I answered.

“Then you don’t know?”

We turned to the left and walked along the parade towards the cliff. No one was about in the cold and gusty night. Now and then a light flashed out across the sea, swept it in a half circle, and vanished in the darkness.

“Oh, I’m not in all Vernon’s secrets,” I said.

Directly I had spoken I regretted my choice of words.

“Secrets!” he said.

“I only mean that Vernon’s not specially given to making confidences. If he has any particular reason for coming to England at this time of year, he hasn’t told it to me. But why should he have any special reason?”

Deeming shrugged his shoulders.

“Where is he going to stay in town?” he asked.

“At Claridge’s, I believe; at any rate, for a time.”

“Then he means to make a long stay?”

His voice still sounded intensely suspicious. Suddenly I felt as if I could not stand all this

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subterfuge, as if I must brush away from me the spider's web of mutual distrust in which my two friends were entangling me with each other.

"My dear fellow!" I exclaimed. "You really make me feel as if I were under cross-examination. I begin to wish I had never introduced you and Vernon to each other."

Deeming stopped dead, and looked at me.

"Perhaps it would have been better," he said. "Much better."

"You think so, too? Why?"

"Can't you see that Vernon hates me?" he said, with violence.

"What earthly reason can he have for hating you?"

"Some men don't ask for reasons. There is something about me which is antipathetic to Vernon, and he's a strange fellow. You think him gentle, I know. But I—well, I believe that underneath his apparent gentleness hides the soul of a fanatic, a black fanatic."

We were still standing face to face. Now I looked into his eyes and said:

"I'm going to be very rude to you."

"Go on. I'll bear it."

"I am perfectly certain you are suffering from nervous exhaustion. You have all the symptoms. You are horribly pale and shaky, and full of irritability and suspicion, ready to entertain any dark idea that may present

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itself to you, unable to see things in a clear light of reason."

"And you, Luttrell; do you know what you are?"

"I!"

"Yes. I'm going to be rude to you. You are either a self-deceiver or a—well, something one doesn't care to call a man. You know quite well, in your heart, that Vernon has come over so soon because—because——"

Suddenly he hesitated, faltered, broke off.

I seemed to hear the whimper of a dog near us in the night.

"I've had enough of the wind," he said. "I'm going in."

And we went back to the hotel without another word.

Next morning, Vernon and I went up to town by an early train, leaving Lord Elyn and Deeming to take their Channel trip. At Charing Cross, as we were parting, Vernon to go to Claridge's and I to my flat in Albemarle Street, Vernon said, "By the way, what is Deeming's address?"

"Three hundred, Wimpole Street," I said.

He took out a card and a pencil.

"Three hundred, Wimpole Street," he repeated slowly, as he wrote it down. "Good-bye. Let's meet to-morrow. Come and lunch with me."

He got into a hansom and drove away. I followed in a moment. As my cab came out

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of the station yard and crossed Trafalgar Square I was enveloped in what I called to myself "the London feeling." The day was warm, but dull and grey. The tall buildings, the statue of Gordon, the Nelson column, the lions, looked sad and phantom-like to my eyes, for many months accustomed to the pellucid clearness of African landscapes, to the brilliant blue of Italian skies. And the well-known depression which always settles down upon me like a fog when I first return to London came to me once more, bathing me in a gloom which I strove in vain to shake off. In this gloom I seemed to see, like shadows passing in a fog, the forms of Vernon, of Deeming, and another form, small, black, and cringing, the form of a dog.

"P'f!" I said to myself. "Am I going to be the slave of a too sensitive imagination?"

And I resolutely began to think of pleasant things, of the friends, of the amusements, of the occupations that would solace me. Yet, when I reached Albemarle Street, I was heavy-hearted, and all that day and the next my depression persisted. Even a cheerful lunch with Vernon at Claridge's and the renewal of many old acquaintanceships failed to restore me to my normal temper.

A week passed by, and I had not seen Deeming. I was beginning to wonder what had become of him, when I received from him

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a note asking me to dine with him at the Carlton on the following evening to meet Vernon. I was, unfortunately, already engaged to dine with some American friends and go to the play; so I wrote to excuse myself, and added this postscript—

“May your dinner banish your mutual misunderstanding. Remember that it will always be a grief to me if my two friends are at cross-purposes.”

The day after the dinner, when I had just come in from the club at seven o'clock in the evening, my servant announced “Doctor Deeming,” and Deeming walked into the room. I saw at once that he was in a condition of unusual excitement. We shook hands, and directly my man had gone out and the door was shut, Deeming, who was still standing and who did not seem to see the chair I offered to him, exclaimed—

“Of course, you have heard about Number 301?”

“Number 301? What the deuce do you mean?” I asked.

“Number 301, Wimpole Street, the house next door to mine.”

“What about it? Has it been burgled, or burnt down, or what?”

“Burnt down! Nonsense! It's been to let for the last three months. Yesterday morning I found the board was down, and last night Vernon told me that he has taken

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it. He's taken it as it is, furnished, and is going in at once."

I was surprised, and, I suppose, showed that I was in my face, for he continued—

"Oh, then you didn't know! He hadn't told you!"

"He has told me nothing."

"It's a strange business. I—I——"

He began to walk to and fro.

"Why should he come to live next door to me? Why should he——?"

He stopped in front of me.

"Did you tell him where I lived?" he said, almost menacingly.

I resented his tone.

"Look here, Deeming," I said, quietly.

"If we are to continue friends, there must really be an end of all this mystery and suspicion about nothing. Why shouldn't I tell Vernon where you live?"

"Did you tell him?"

"Certainly. He asked me, and of course I answered. Are you a criminal hiding from justice, and is Vernon a detective? Upon my word——"

I felt I was getting hot, and was silent. He stood quite still, staring at me for a moment with eyes that were almost fierce. Then he sat down on a sofa a little way from me, and said in a calmer voice—

"Yes, of course there was no reason. Still, it's very odd. You must see that."

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“What is there odd in it? If it’s a good house, why shouldn’t Vernon take it as well as anyone else?”

“It’s a fairly good house.”

He moved, and leaned towards me.

“Originally,” he said, speaking slowly, “originally it was one with mine. The two houses were thrown into one. That was when Renold, the author, lived there. Afterwards, it was as it is now. But it’s still almost like one house.”

“How can that be?”

“Well, the alteration was very flimsily carried out, I suppose; for in the one house one can—I hope to goodness Vernon isn’t much of a musician.”

“You’re afraid of being disturbed?”

“If he plays the piano—by Jove!”

He burst into a laugh.

“Look out in the papers very soon,” he said. “I shall probably be bringing a case against him for annoyance. I can’t stand a hullabaloo next door after I’ve finished my day’s work. I want rest and peace. It’s no joke being a successful physician, I can tell you.”

I laughed too, almost as unnaturally as he had.

“Oh,” I said, “you needn’t be afraid. Vernon does play, but I’m sure, if you ask him, he’ll put his piano against the wall of the other house, and keep the windows shut when he is

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practising. Why didn't you speak about it last night?"

"I'll ask no favours of Vernon," he said sternly.

Then he got up.

"I thought I'd just tell you," he said. "Now I can't stop. I've got a patient to see."

He gave me a feverish hand, and went quickly out of the room.

While he was with me, I had endeavoured to make light of his news, to deceive him into the belief that I thought Vernon's action a chance one, but directly I was alone I felt, though less agitated, nearly as angry at this affair as he did. It was a strange business—this pursuit. Deeming had said to me at Dover that Vernon was a "black fanatic"; what if it were so? What if my friend, so kind, so calm, even so unusually gentle in ordinary life, well balanced and eminently sane in his outlook upon men and affairs, really had a "screw loose"—to use the current phrase? What if the fate of his dog had actually affected his mind? I knew that there are men in the world who are sound on all subjects except one. Touch upon that subject, and they show an eccentricity that is akin to madness. It might be so with Vernon. I began to feel as if it must be so, and a great restlessness, a great uneasiness, beset me. Driven by it, I caught up my hat, hurried downstairs, hailed a hansom, and went to Claridge's.

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The hall-porter informed me that Mr. Ker-steven was out.

"Do you happen to know where he has gone?" I asked.

"No, sir; he didn't leave any word."

My cab was waiting. I jumped into it again and called to the man—

"Go to 301, Wimpole Street."

My instinct told me that I should find Vernon there.

Night was now falling. It was the hour when, to me, London presents its dreariest aspect. The streets are not yet thronged with those who, having worked during the day, are beginning to seek their nocturnal pleasures. The just-lit lamps are waging a feeble combat with the last fading rays of the flickering twilight. There is a sense of something closing in, like a furtive enemy, upon the great city. As I neared Wimpole Street I noticed that a fine rain was beginning to fall. The air was damp, without freshness, oppressive. In the gloom the cabman mistook the number and stopped at Deeming's door. I got out quickly, paid and dismissed him, and was about to move on to Number 301, when it seemed to me that I heard the shrill, short whine of a dog. It startled me, and I remained where I was, listening in the rain. The sound was not repeated. I looked down the dismal street, but I saw no animal. I had not been able to locate the noise. I glanced at Deeming's

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house. It was dark. Only from a window in the area shone a pale gleam of light. After two or three minutes' hesitation I moved away, ascended the step of Number 301, and pressed the electric-bell. There was no response. I pressed it again and kept my finger upon it for at least a minute. This time my summons was answered, though in a rather unorthodox fashion. A window on the first-floor was pushed up, and I saw a vague face looking out at me from above.

"Vernon," I said, "is it you?"

No voice replied, but the window was shut down, and almost directly, through some glass above the hall-door, I saw a bright light start up, and I heard a faint movement within. Then the door was opened and Vernon stood before me. He looked greatly surprised.

"You?" he said. "How on earth did you know I was here?"

"I didn't know it. Can I come in?"

"Yes. Why not?"

But he still stood in the doorway, blocking up the entrance.

"You're alone?" he asked, rather suspiciously.

"Quite alone."

"Come in."

I stepped into a hideous passage, and he at once shut the door.

"Well?" he said.

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Not only his voice, but his attitude questioned me.

"I went to Claridge's. They told me you were out, so I came on here on the chance that you might be looking over your new abode."

"So Deeming's been with you!"

"Yes, he came in for a minute, and mentioned casually that you had taken this house."

"Oh! he mentioned it casually, did he? Well, come and have a look at it, won't you?"

"If you don't mind."

He spoke with constraint, and so did I. Indeed, I had never before felt so uncomfortable with Vernon as I did at this moment. I did not know exactly what I had expected of him if I found him at the house; but it certainly was not this cold reserve, as of one who scarcely knew me, and to whom my appearance was unwelcome.

"It's not a bad house," he said, as we went towards the stairs. "It will do very well for me for the season."

"You're in luck, then."

The words faltered on my lips even while I strove to speak carelessly, for, in truth, knowing Vernon as I did, knowing his house in Rome, it was almost impossible not to express my amazement at his choice—or, no, perhaps not that, for I could no longer be in any doubt as to why he had rented Number 301—but it was almost impossible to keep up

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the ridiculous pretence, forced upon me by his words and manner, that I thought he had rented Number 301 because it had seemed to him a suitable London home.

A more dreadful house I have seldom seen. The stamp of bad taste, of pretentious middle-class vulgarity, was upon it, showing in every detail, in the colouring of walls, in the patterns of carpets, in the shapes of the furniture, in the tiles of the hearths, in the very balusters and fire-irons. The mirrors were painted with bulrushes, poppies, tulips. Cushions of brown and sulphur-coloured plush lay upon settees that imitated shells. Chocolate-hued portières hung across double doors, upon which were views of Swiss lakes and Alpine heights. There were ceilings that represented the starry firmament, and there were floors that suggested the vegetable-monger's shop. In "cosy corners," thick with dusty draperies, nestled imitation beetles and frogs, among Japanese fans and squads of photographs of possibly well-known actresses, roofed in by open umbrellas of paper, from whose spokes hung gilded balls.

And there were yellow spotted palms in pots, wrapped, like a face distraught with toothache, in smothering cloths of bilious yellow and of shrieking green.

"Not a bad house, is it?" said Vernon once more, when we had partially explored it. By the words, by his manner, I was made at once

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to realise that from this moment he intended to keep me out of his confidence. Why this was so I could only try to surmise. As to action, all I could do was to accept the situation and follow him in travesty with as good a grace as possible. It was evident that Vernon's suspicions of my good faith had been aroused by my unexpected visit, following so immediately upon Deeming's announcement of the taking of the house, and that he had resolved to show me that he would not permit any criticism, even any discussion of his doings, however strange, however hostile to Deeming they must seem to me in the light of recent events.

"Not at all bad," I answered.

We were standing at the moment in the terrible double drawing-room. I carefully abstained from looking round. There was an instant of, to me, rather embarrassing silence. Then Vernon said—

"Well, shall we go out together? It's getting rather late. You hadn't anything special to say to me, I suppose?"

"No, nothing. I just called at the hotel, and thought, as you were out, I might find you examining your new abode."

Even as I spoke I involuntarily shuddered; I thought at the idea of Vernon living in this house, this inmost sanctuary of Philistinism.

"Why did you do that?" he said sharply.

"What?"

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“Shiver like that. Did you—did you hear anything?”

His eyes searched mine; and once more I saw the fierce light in them.

“Hear? No. What should I hear?”

He did not answer; but continued to stare at me as if he doubted my words. Then he said abruptly:

“Let us be off, then.”

We descended the stairs and let ourselves out into the darkness and the rain. As we passed Deeming's house I seemed once more to hear the shrill whimper of a dog. I wondered if Vernon had heard it too, for he hesitated by the step of the door, almost as if he thought of mounting it, and glanced swiftly down to the area, from which still shone the ray of light. But he said nothing, and we walked on, and were soon in the bustle of Oxford Street.

V

AFTER seeing Vernon that evening in No. 301, Wimpole Street, I knew two things for certain. One was that he had taken the house in order to be next door to Deeming; the other, that whatever project he might have formed, whatever intention or desire was driving him on into a strange path, he did not mean me to know of it through him. I was to be shut out from his confidence.

This fact, while it irritated me, also relieved me. It rendered my position as the friend of both men more tenable than it could have been had Vernon confided in me. Now, if at any time Deeming were suspicious of me, I should be able to confront him with the complacency of a complete innocence, whereas hitherto I had more than once experienced the discomfort of—I hope I may say it without offence—an honourable man who is forced by circumstance to practise a mild deceit. This was a relief.

Nevertheless, I did feel both irritation and surprise at Vernon's attitude towards me. It seemed to throw a chill over our friendship. If he had never spoken to me of Deeming and his black spaniel, the matter would not have troubled me, but a confidence begun and then abruptly discontinued surely implies that one's

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friendship is doubted. I could no longer feel quite at ease when I was with Vernon. A dark and cringing shadow separated us.

Vernon moved into his dreadful house two days after I had first seen it. I naturally expected that, being a rich man, he would immediately begin to tear down draperies, to get in new furniture, to lay down carpets that did not recall the vegetable-monger's, to turn out the frogs and the beetles, and to do away with the paper umbrellas. I was mistaken. He left things much as they were.

"I don't suppose I shall be here long," he said.

"I thought you had the house on a year's lease?" I rejoined.

"The owner wouldn't let it for a shorter time. But I don't expect to be here for twelve months, or anything like it. I may be out of it in a month. Who knows?"

He glanced at me as if he expected me to find some hidden meaning in his words, some meaning which he did not choose to put before me.

"I'm not even going to be bothered with a staff of servants," he continued. "I shall only have my man, Cragg, and one woman who can do all that is necessary for me."

"Really! What does Cragg think of it?" I ventured.

"Oh, Cragg has been with me for years and thoroughly understands me."

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I knew that; I knew, too, that Cragg was a rare being, a confidential servant who was absolutely faithful. But, still, Cragg was unaccustomed to such a peculiar kind of "roughing it" as was now in prospect.

"I hope you'll be comfortable," I said, rather lamely.

"Oh, yes. Of course, I don't intend to entertain here. I shall imitate Deeming. I shall exercise all my hospitality in restaurants. The Englishman's house is more than ever his castle since the restaurant came into fashion."

And he laughed.

"But perhaps, now I'm next door, Deeming may ask me in sometimes in the evening," he said. "We ought to be neighbourly."

Something in his voice, as he said the last words, turned me cold. I felt quite sure, for the first time, that hatred was blazing in his heart, hatred against Deeming. Of course, I could not speak of my new certainty now that I was confronted by his reserve, but a sudden idea sprang up within my brain. There was one way, and one way only, of brushing aside this spider's-web of suspicion and intrigue, which was being woven day by day, and it was this. If I could only ascertain for myself, and prove to Vernon, that the mysterious black spaniel was happy as had been his "Whisper," well-cared-for, well-loved, these two men who were at secret enmity would doubtless at once be reconciled, and I should

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no longer have to endure the vexation of being on uneasy terms with both. Vernon knew me well enough to know that if I made a solemn statement he could absolutely rely upon it. Deeming disliked him, as men generally and naturally dislike those who, without good reason, are suspicious of them. But though he was now cold and distant with me, I could not think that he disliked me. Where Vernon would probably fail, I might surely succeed. It was such a simple matter after all. I merely wanted to see a dog with his master, Deeming with his black spaniel. That could surely be managed without much difficulty and before many days had elapsed. I said nothing to Vernon of my project. Indeed, I resolved not to seek a meeting with him until I had accomplished it. Our present intercourse was too restrained to be particularly agreeable. The London season was setting in and there was much to be got through. I could easily avoid Vernon for a few days and, when I had the news I wanted, go to him and put an end to a condition of things at once painful and—so I called it resolutely to myself—ridiculous.

Having made up my mind, I had only to act. I must see Deeming's black spaniel, and see him with his master.

I began my campaign by calling one evening at Deeming's house at an hour when I thought it probable that the last sufferer would have gone. But I had miscalculated

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his popularity as a doctor. His extremely thin and sympathetic butler informed me in a whispering voice that the waiting-room was still thronged with anxious patients.

"When is he free?" I inquired.

"He is engaged all day, Sir, at this season of the year."

"Does he never get out for a breath of air?"

"Oh, yes, Sir, when he drives out to the hospital."

"And on a Sunday, I suppose. No doubt"—I tried to make my voice very natural and careless at this point—"he goes out on a Sunday if it's fine, to give the dog a run, eh?"

It seemed to me that the butler's pale face slightly twisted as I said the last words, as if he made a sudden effort not to show in it some expression which would have betrayed a feeling; as if he suppressed, perhaps, a smile, or concealed a knowing leer.

"The Doctor's generally shut up on a Sunday, writing, Sir," he murmured, "or pursuing his researches."

"Oh!"

There seemed nothing more to be done just then, and as I saw a patient coming out and looking for his hat in the hall, I went away.

That evening I wrote to Deeming, telling him I had called to see if I could persuade him

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to take a stroll, as I was sure his health needed some rest, air, and relaxation.

"Will you come for a walk in Regent's Park some Sunday morning?" I ended, regardless of the butler's information.

He answered, by return, that he would come, if I liked, on the following Sunday. I replied, fixing the hour, and saying I would call for him. This done, I went out and—bought a dog.

It was a gay fox-terrier, young, full of abounding life, and quite ready to attach itself to anyone who was kind to it. When Sunday arrived, it was already devoted to me, and gleefully accompanied me to Wimpole Street to fetch Deeming for the promised walk. While I rang the bell it squatted on the step, wagging its short tail, and looking eagerly expectant. The butler opened the door.

"The Doctor is quite ready, Sir," he said, when he saw me. "Will you step in?"

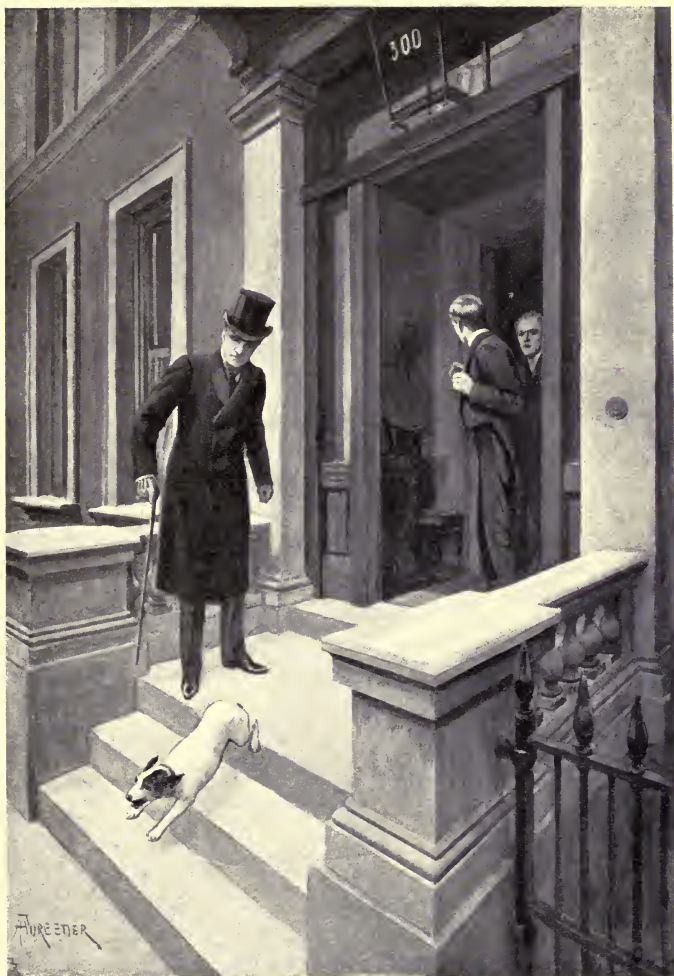
Suddenly he caught sight of the dog, who had jumped up when the door was opened, and was evidently preparing for exploration.

"Is that your dog, Sir?"

"Yes," I said.

"I don't think the Doctor—— Get back, you little beast!"

The last exclamation came in a voice so different from the whispering one I was accustomed to that I could hardly believe it was the



"AS HE VANISHED, DEEMING APPEARED AT THE HALL DOOR."

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butler who had spoken. At the same moment my dog dodged his outstretched foot and vanished, pattering, into the house.

"Call him back, Sir; call him back, for the Lord's sake, or there'll be trouble!" exclaimed the butler, turning sharply with the evident intention of trying to catch the little culprit. But he had no time to act nor I to call. Almost as he spoke there came from within the house the piercing cry of a dog in pain, and the fox-terrier darted out of the hall, down the street, and disappeared, yelping shrilly as he went, with his ears set flat against his head, and his tail tucked down in his back. As he vanished, Deeming appeared at the hall-door.

"How dare you let stray dogs into my house?" he said to the butler in a savage voice.

"I beg pardon, Sir," stammered the butler; "but it was this gentleman's dog, and——"

"It was your dog, was it?" said Deeming, turning to me. "I did not know you had a dog."

I was feeling so angry that I could hardly trust myself to speak.

"Certainly it's mine," I said curtly. "I must go and find it."

And without another word I walked away down the street. I could not discover the dog. Its terror had evidently been so great that it had fled blindly and far. From that day to this I have never seen it or heard anything of it. When it rushed out of Deeming's house it

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rushed out of my life. Having failed to find it, after walking some distance, I gave up the search and stood still. The natural thing, I suppose, would have been to retrace my steps to Wimpole Street, where Deeming was waiting for me. But this I did not do. I felt that I could not do it. An invincible repulsion against Deeming's society had come into my heart. When I thought of him I saw the fox-terrier fleeing, with his ears set back against his head; I heard the yelping of a dog.

I stood, therefore, for a moment, and then walked home to Albemarle Street.

I had bought the dog in order to find out, if possible, how Deeming was with animals, how they comported themselves towards him. Secondarily I had thought of using the dog as a pretext for introducing the subject of the black spaniel. I had meant, when Deeming came out, to point to my dog and suggest that, as I had mine with me for the walk, he should bring out his.

Well, my curiosity had surely been satisfied. I had not, it is true, seen the mysterious black spaniel; but I could hardly remain in doubt as to Deeming's attitude towards pet animals. The expression upon his face as he came out from the hall had been ferocious. Vernon was right. Deeming was a cruel man.

As I realised that, I began to wonder more

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about the black spaniel. Why should such a man keep a pet—a man, too, who was so incessantly occupied that he had no time for amusement, for almost any relaxations? And why had the butler—for I now felt sure that I had seen his face contorted for an instant on the evening when I had spoken to him of the black spaniel—why had the butler felt such amazement, or bitter contempt, or sardonic amusement, when I had alluded to the possibility of Deeming giving the black spaniel a run?

It almost began to seem to me just then as if the black spaniel were a baleful chimera, like the creation of a madman's brain, a nothingness that yet can govern, can terrify, can cause tragic events and lead to bitterness and crime. Who had ever seen this creature? Where was it, in what place of concealment? Did it ever come forth into the light of day? I longed to know something of it, of its existence in that house, of its relations with its master.

Perhaps Vernon knew or would know. He lived next door. He had gone there to discover; of that I was sure. He watched at his window to see the spaniel let out. He listened at his wall at night, perhaps, to hear its whining.

Perhaps Vernon knew or would know.

And when he knew, would he tell me?

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In the afternoon of that day I received a note from Deeming—

I waited for you to come back for an age. What was the matter? I am very sorry about your dog. The fact is I am not very well and in a nervous condition, and it startled me to come suddenly upon it in the dimly lighted hall. Let me know when we can meet.

P. D.

That was the note. I read it several times before I threw it into the waste-paper basket. But I did not answer it. I felt that I did not want to meet Deeming again for some time.

I felt that. Fate willed it that I should never look upon him again as mortal man. Within two days from that time I was called to the North of England by the serious illness of my dear mother, who lived in Cumberland. And there I remained until she died. Her death took place on the twenty-seventh of June. Her funeral was three days later. After it was over I returned to the house where I had been born, where I was now quite alone with the servants. I had to wind up many affairs, to put many things in order, to sort and examine papers and pay off some of the household. Despite my grief I was obliged to be busy, to be practical. For several days I was so much occupied that I did not look at a newspaper. I even set aside the letters that came by the post—letters of condolence, I felt sure they were, most of them—wishing to read

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them and answer them all together when I had leisure, and felt less miserable and deserted, and more able to take an interest in such affairs as were not actually forced upon me.

At last one evening I had got through everything. I had dined, and was sitting alone in the drawing-room, where my mother had always sat, feeling really almost as if I dwelt in a world unpeopled, or peopled only by the spectres of those who once had lived, when a servant came in with the last post. There were no letters, only two or three papers from London. Without interest, merely to do something, I tore the paper covering from one and unfolded it. My eyes fell at once upon the following paragraph—

As so many rumours have been put into circulation with regard to the lamented decease of Dr. Peter Deeming, which took place on the 30th of June, we are glad to be able to state authoritatively that the actual cause of death was blood-poisoning, which was, it seems, set up by the bite of a dog. Doctor Deeming, like many other eminent medical men, while solicitous for the health of others, was singularly careless about his own. The bite was severe, but he took little heed of it, although he had the dog, which was a pet, destroyed. He has now paid the penalty of his regrettable carelessness, and society is the poorer. For no West End physician was more trusted and esteemed by his patients than Dr. Deeming.

The paper dropped from my hand.
So Deeming and the black spaniel were
dead! And each had destroyed the other!

PART II—THE RESURRECTION

VI

PETER DEEMING died on the thirtieth of June, in the year 1900. In June of the following year, as I was walking past the Knightsbridge Barracks, I met Vernon strolling along in the sunshine, with a cigarette in his mouth. When he saw me, he stopped, took my hand, and clasped it warmly.

“Back at last!” he said.

“Yes. I only arrived yesterday. Did you winter in Rome, as usual?”

“No. I’ve not been out of England.”

“Good Heavens!” I exclaimed. “You don’t mean to say you’ve been facing the London fogs while I’ve been in Africa and Sicily?”

He nodded.

“What can have been your reason?”

He put his arm through mine.

“Let’s go into the Park,” he said. “We’ll take a stroll, and I’ll tell you.”

We turned into the Park by the nearest gate, and walked gently along under the trees. It was a strangely radiant day for London—a day that seemed full of hope and gaiety. Many children were about laughing, playing, calling to each other. Poor people basked in

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the sunshine, stretched upon the short grass. Carriages rolled by, drawn by fine horses. In the trees the birds were singing, as innocently as they sing in retired country places. And I felt glad and at ease. It was pleasant to be with Vernon once more, pleasant to be once more in my own land among my own people.

"Well, Vernon?" I said.

"First," he answered, "you must tell me something. You must tell me why you left England after the death of your mother, without coming to say good-bye to me."

"I felt upset, broken down, as if I didn't want to see anyone, as if I wanted to get away and be alone among new scenes and people who were strangers."

"That was it?"

I heard the doubt in his voice, and added—

"There was another reason, too, an under-reason."

"Yes?"

"That sudden death of poor Deeming, coming just after my mother's, upset my nerves, I think. It made me feel as if—as if I had been cruel. It filled me with regret."

"Cruel! I don't understand."

"No. How could you? But when a man's dead, one thinks very differently about him often. And I had been suspicious of Deeming. At the end, indeed, I had been unfriendly."

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"I am quite in the dark," he said, rather coldly, I thought.

I explained to him what I meant. I told him of my last meeting with Deeming, of the incident of the fox-terrier, of Deeming's note to me, of how I had left it unanswered. He listened with a profound attention.

"When I read of his death in the paper I wished I had answered his note," I concluded. "I wished it more than I can tell you. And I regretted bitterly that the last weeks of our intercourse had been clouded by suspicion, by misunderstanding."

"Ah!"

His voice still sounded cold. After a moment he said:

"And you didn't come to see me because——"

"Well, you had been mixed up with my suspicion of Deeming, and——"

"Now I understand. You felt a very natural longing to be away from all that recalled sadness to you, that might deepen your grief or serve to irritate your nerves."

"I suppose that was it. I went right away. I wanted to forget, to escape out of a dark cloud into a clear atmosphere. But you? Why have you been in London all this time?"

"I've been working."

"Working! You?"

"Even I—idler, dilettante."

"Music?"

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"I've been working with Arthur Gernham."

"For the animals?"

"Exactly. For our brothers and sisters who do not speak our language. I've been writing pamphlets, I've been gathering subscriptions, I've been stirring people up, and by doing so I've been stirring myself up, my slothful, sluggish, unpractical self."

"Wonderful!"

"Isn't it? Do you know that I've toured the United Kingdom giving lectures on the subject of man's duty to the animals, that I've helped to form a league of kindness? Luttrell, I'm a busy man now, and I am an enthusiastic man."

While he spoke his animation had been growing, and as he ended his voice was full of energy.

"And when did the impulse come to you to begin this new life?" I asked.

"I can tell you the very day," he said. "It was on June the 30th of last year."

"June the 30th!" I said. "Why, that was the day that Deeming died!"

"Well, it was on that day."

I looked at him sharply. I had never yet heard any details connected with the accident that had brought about Deeming's illness and so caused his death. I wondered if Vernon knew any. He had lived next door. I longed to ask him, but something,

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some inner voice of my nature, advised me not to.

"Is Gernham a good fellow?" I said carelessly.

"A splendid fellow. You must know him."

"As you have changed so much," I continued, "have you altered that resolution of yours?"

"What resolution?"

"Never to make another animal happy as you made your spaniel, Whisper, happy?"

"Ah, that—no! I could never have another pet. I suffered too much from my affection, Luttrell. I am resolved not to suffer again in that way. The mountains may fall, but I shall never keep another dog."

He spoke with a decision that carried conviction. At that moment I should have been ready to stake my entire fortune on his sticking to his assertion and backing it up by his acts. If anyone had come to me that night and said, "Your friend Vernon has just bought a dog and taken it home to live with him," I should have laughed, and answered in polite terms, "You're a liar." But one cannot deny the evidence of one's own eyes.

Now this is exactly what occurred.

While we walked along beneath the trees, not very far from the Statue of Achilles, I saw in the distance a man approaching us, leading a number of dogs by strings and carrying



"THAT DOG THERE," SAID VERNON; "HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD HIM?"



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a couple of puppies under his arms. He wore a fur cap and earrings, a short, loud-patterned coat with tails, and a pair of very tight trousers. As he drew near I saw that among the dogs who accompanied him there was a fine black spaniel.

"Here comes a choice assortment of dumb friends," I said to Vernon.

"Yes."

I saw him looking at the dogs, which were sniffing the air, and pulling at their leads in the endeavour to investigate delicious smells. Suddenly he stopped short, just as the man was passing us. At the same moment I saw the black spaniel shrink back and cower down against the ground, pressing his broad, flapping ears against his head.

"What is it, Vernon?" I said.

He did not reply. He was staring at the spaniel. The owner of the dogs saw a possible purchaser, and at once, in a soft and very disagreeable voice, began to enumerate their merits.

"H'sh!" Vernon hissed at him.

The man stopped in astonishment.

"That dog there," said Vernon, pointing to the black spaniel, which was still shrinking down, and pulling back from his lead in an effort to get away. "How long have you had him?"

"Ever since he was baun, gen'leman," re-

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plied the man. "'E's the gentlenist, the best-mannered dawg as hiver——"

"How old is he? What's his age?"

"Just upon a year, Sir, a year 'e'll be this very selfsame month. 'E was one of as fine a litter o' pups as——"

"You bred him?"

"Yes, Sir."

"A year old, is he?"

"Just upon, Sir. The thirtieth's the day, Sir—the thirtieth of this selfsame month. Law bless you, I knows the birthdays of hivery dawg as hiver——"

"What's his price?"

The man licked his lips, and I saw a gleam in his small eyes.

"Well, Sir, I dunno as I'm dispoged to part with 'im. You see, I gets to love——"

"How much?"

The tone was sharp. The words came almost like a pistol-shot.

"Ten puns, Sir," said the man. "I should say, fifteen puns, Sir."

"I'll give you twelve."

"I reely couldn't tike it, Sir. The dawg's the very happle of——"

"There's my address—301, Wimpole Street." He gave the man his card. "Bring the dog there at six o'clock this evening, and you shall have twelve pounds, not a penny more. Good-day."

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“I’ll be there, Sir. You can trust me, you can——”

We walked on. As we did so, the spaniel whimpered, ran to his master, and fawned about his legs as if demanding protection.

For several minutes neither Vernon nor I said a word. I was in amazement. What had just happened may seem to some a very small matter. To me it seemed extraordinary, mysterious, even—I could not tell why—horrible. There had been something peculiar in Vernon’s attitude, in his face, while he stood looking at the spaniel, something fatal that had affected my nerves. Then my wonder was naturally great that such a man should thus abruptly go back from his word. And the spaniel’s cringing attitude of terror when Vernon had gazed at him, had spoken to his master, was disagreeable to me, acutely disagreeable in the remembrance of it! It seemed to me very strange and unnatural that such an ardent lover of animals as Vernon was should inspire an animal with fear. Animals have an instinct that always tells them who loves them. This spaniel was apparently without this instinct.

Perhaps it was this lack in him that made me now think of him with a faint dislike, even a faint disgust, such as the healthy-minded feel when brought into contact with anything unnatural.

I broke the silence first.

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"I did not know you were a changeable man," I said.

"You mean that I have changed my mind about keeping a dog."

"Yes, and with such extraordinary suddenness."

"I suppose it does seem odd," he remarked. "But who knows what he will do?"

"But—what was your reason?"

He looked at me, very strangely, I thought.

"A sudden impulse," he answered. "A memory, perhaps, moved me."

"The memory of Whisper?"

"Of Whisper—of course."

His voice seemed to me just then as strange as his face. Perhaps seeing that I still wondered, he added—

"That spaniel appeared to be nervous, terrified. Perhaps that man is cruel to it."

"Oh, but——" I began, and stopped.

"What is it?"

"You didn't think—it seemed to me that it was you who inspired the dog with fear."

"I!" He laughed. "My dear fellow, a dog-lover like myself cannot inspire a dog with fear. You must be mistaken. Animals always know who loves them."

"Yes. It's very strange," I murmured.

"What is strange?" he asked, in rather a hard voice.

"Oh, I don't know—nothing," I answered evasively. "Here we are at the gate."

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"Yes. Well, you are coming to see me?"

"Of course. You are still in that house?"

"Oh, yes. It suits me. When will you come?"

"Whenever you like."

He stood for a moment, making patterns with his stick on the pavement and looking down. Then he glanced up at me.

"Come and have a cup of tea this afternoon at half-past five, will you?" he said.

I immediately thought of the man with the earrings and the fur cap. Then I was to see the transfer of the black spaniel.

"I'll come," I answered.

"Right!"

Vernon nodded and walked away slowly in the direction of Hamilton Place.

VII

AT a quarter past five that day I started for Wimpole Street, filled with a sensation of strong curiosity, for which, in mental debate with myself, I could not quite satisfactorily account. It was a very ordinary matter, surely, this selling and buying of a dog. Why, then, did it seem to me an affair of importance? I asked myself that question while I waited. The only answer I could find was that the dog was a black spaniel, and that before the sad death of my friend Deeming a black spaniel, the creature that had caused the tragedy, had mysteriously complicated, and indeed altered, my pleasant relations both with him and with Vernon. But all that was a year ago. The past does not return, and therefore it was absurd to be—to be—what? What was really the exact nature of the emotion that now beset me? Had I been strictly truthful with myself I should, perhaps, have called it apprehension. But we are not always strictly truthful even with ourselves. I think that day I named it nervousness. I was nervous, out of sorts, a little bit depressed. Vernon's *volte-face* had surprised me. The dog's cringing fear had made an unpleasant impression upon me. And so, now, as I drew near to Wimpole

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Street I was slightly strung up. That was the long and short of it.

In some such fashion I think I spoke to myself, explanatorily, falsely.

When I turned into Wimpole Street the image of poor Deeming was very present in my mind, and I could scarcely believe that he did not still inhabit the house to which I had come that Sunday morning. I wondered who lived there now, who was Vernon's neighbour; and when I reached the house I looked towards it with a sad curiosity, which quickly changed to surprise. The house was transformed. Where once had been a doorstep there was now an area railing. The front door had vanished. In its place was a window, with a box in which roses and geraniums were blooming. In a moment I realised what had happened. Formerly the two houses—Nos. 300 and 301—had been one house. Since I had been there they had once more been thrown together. Vernon, then, was living now in the house that had been Deeming's. As I grasped this fact, Vernon appeared at a window of what had been the second house. Seeing me, he smiled and waved his hand. Before I could ring, the door was opened by Cragg, his faithful man.

"Glad to see you again, Sir," said Cragg, with a respectful bow which he had learnt, I think, in Italy.

He had several little foreign ways, but was

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extremely English in appearance—calm, solid, neat, and closely shaven.

I returned his greeting and stepped in.

“Ah,” I said, looking round. “So it’s all changed.”

“Yes, Sir. After Doctor Deeming’s death we got rid of the old stuff, and Mr. Kersteven bought the Doctor’s house and threw the two houses into one. It’s more suitable now.”

“It was awful before.”

“Well, Sir, it was scarcely to Mr. Kersteven’s taste. We rather roughed it for a time, Sir.”

He took my hat and stick and showed me upstairs into a charming drawing-room, in which I at once recognised many beautiful things from Vernon’s house in Rome. Here Vernon met me with an outstretched hand.

“By Jove, what a transformation!” I exclaimed.

“To be sure, you haven’t seen it since——”

“Since the frogs and the beetles and the Japanese umbrellas were turned out. No. And so now you’ve got Deeming’s house too?”

“Yes. I have joined the two together, but I use his chiefly for my work in connection with our dumb friends.”

“Oh!”

His voice was significant in that last sentence, and I realised that in him imagination was often the guide, leading him strangely, dominating him powerfully.

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Tea was ready, and we sat down.

Giving expression to my thought, I said, "Strange that you should be living in Deeming's house."

"Why so?"

"Oh, well, you were antagonists, weren't you?"

"Could the difference between us be called antagonism?" he asked, pouring out the tea.

"Wasn't it? Once Deeming told me that he knew——"

I hesitated.

"Knew what?"

"Knew that you hated him."

"Really. Did he say that?"

"Was it true?"

"Why discuss it?"

"You're right. It's all over now. And he, poor chap, has gone beyond the reach of earthly love or hate."

He made no rejoinder, and I had an odd feeling as if he were silent because I had said something with which he did not agree; yet that was not possible.

"Do you think," I said, to change the subject, "do you think that fellow will come?"

"The dog-fancier? Oh, I suppose so. He won't let slip a chance of making twelve pounds. His dog isn't worth more than six."

"Then why do you give double?"

"A caprice."

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"I begin to think you are a capricious man," I said.

"The dilettante generally is."

He drew out his watch.

"It's close upon six. That chap ought to be here in a moment. Ah, there's the bell! He's come, no doubt."

I was conscious of a certain discomfort, but scarcely knew its cause. Putting down my cup, I sat listening intently. Vernon, too, was listening. There was in his face an expression of strained attention. When the door opened gently, I started and looked hastily round.

"Lord Elyn!" said Vernon, getting up from his chair.

"Yes. Glad to find you at home. Hulloo, Luttrell! So you're back at last! I haven't seen you since the death of our poor friend Deeming."

He shook my hand.

"That was a sad business. No one to take his place. No one like him, is there?"

He sat down and stretched his legs. I said something suitable, but with rather an uncertain voice. This unexpected arrival irritated me. And yet I thoroughly liked Lord Elyn. Vernon, too—I felt sure of it—was vexed by his arrival, but he was charmingly courteous, though, in the trifling conversation that followed, he showed traces of absent-mindedness. I knew he was listening for the sound of the

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bell. I knew he was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the black spaniel. Six o'clock struck. The hand of a clock on the mantelpiece pointed to five minutes, then to ten minutes past six. Vernon began to betray a certain restlessness, a certain uneasiness. He twice changed his place in the room. Finally, he got up and remained standing.

"You are expecting someone?" said Lord Elyn, looking at him in some surprise.

"Yes. The fact is I've bought a dog—or named my price for one—and he ought to be brought here this evening."

"Oh, I'm very fond of dogs. Kept them all my life. What sort of animal is this one?"

"A black——there's the bell!"

He broke off, went swiftly over to the window and looked out. As he stood with his back turned to us I heard him utter a low exclamation.

"What did you say, Vernon?" I asked sharply.

I had not heard a word, but there was a thrilling sound in his voice which startled me. I got up also from my chair, possessed, gnawed by an inexplicable restlessness. Vernon turned round from the window. I saw the strange light in his eyes which I had sometimes noticed there when he talked about the animals and their relation with man.

"It's the spaniel," he said.

The words were simple enough, but the

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way in which he said them was not simple. It sounded cruel and triumphant.

Lord Elyn looked more surprised. He also got up.

"The arrival of this dog seems quite an event," he said.

"Yes, quite an event," repeated Vernon, looking towards the door. "It's years since I've had a—pet."

"If you please, Sir, there's a person here with a dog."

"I know. I expected him."

"Indeed, Sir. Am I to admit him?"

"Certainly."

"And the dog, Sir? Is he to come in too?"

"Of course. It's the dog I want, not the man."

Cragg remained in the doorway, looking at his master.

"What is it, Cragg?" asked Vernon.
"What the deuce is the matter?"

"Well, Sir, I don't see—I don't, really—how we are ever going to get that dog into the house."

"What do you mean?" said Vernon.

On his lips there was playing a slight smile.

"I never see an animal in such a state, Sir; I really never did. Hark, Sir!"

He lifted his hand. From below there came to us the sound of a long-drawn howling. Again I felt a cold chill go over me. Lord

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Elyn, too, was unpleasantly affected. He shook his shoulders, and said—

“Good God, what a dreadful noise! It sounds like something being tortured.”

Vernon was still smiling.

“Oh!” he said; “it’s only the natural nervousness of a dog brought to a strange house to change one master for another. Go along, Cragg. Show the man into my study. I’ll come down in a moment.”

Still looking very doubtful, Cragg disappeared, shutting the door. We three remained silent for a moment. Then Vernon said—

“I’m afraid you’re having a very fussy visit, Lord Elyn. Do sit down. I’ll go and pay the man, and be back in a minute.”

It was evident to me that he wanted—wanted ungovernably—to see the dog brought into the house. As he stopped speaking he was gone. He had almost darted out of the room.

“Dear me!” said Lord Elyn. “Dear me.”

He was a delicate, naturally nervous man, and highly sensitive. I could see plainly that he was upset, mystified by this affair of the arrival of the dog. He looked at me as if inquiring of me what it all meant.

“I wonder——” he began.

Then he broke off. After a pause he said—

“If the dog often howls as he did just now, Vernon won’t have much peace. I

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never in my life heard a more distressing noise, eh?"

"It was very distressing," I assented.

Lord Elyn did not sit down, but went to and fro in the room like one disturbed.

"A most distressing noise!" he repeated, uncomfortably. "Most distressing. It really almost sounded like a human being in agony, didn't it?"

"Yes, it did."

"What sort of dog is it?" he asked presently, standing before me. "Do you know?"

"A black spaniel."

"A spaniel? They're the most sensitive breed of dog I know, intensely nervous and easily frightened, but very affectionate. They attach themselves in an extraordinary manner to those who are kind to them."

"Hulloa!" he exclaimed. The door had reopened, and Vernon came in.

"Well," he said, "it's all right. I've got the dog for twelve pounds."

"Where is it?" said Lord Elyn.

"Downstairs in my study. I've had to tie him up for the moment. Poor fellow, he's nervous at getting into a strange house."

"Let's have a look at him," said Lord Elyn.

I saw that Vernon hesitated, and thought he was going to refuse the request, natural though it was. But if he had intended to do so, he quickly changed his mind.

"Certainly," he said. "Come downstairs.

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My study is in the part of the house that once belonged to Deeming."

Lord Elyn went out of the room, I followed, and Vernon came last.

"To the right!" he said, when we reached the bottom of the staircase. "This corridor unites the two houses."

We followed the direction indicated.

"Here's the study," said Vernon. "It's a real workroom, dedicated to the cause of our dumb friends."

"The animals?" said Lord Elyn. "It seems to me, after this evening, that dumb is scarcely the appropriate adjective to apply to them."

Vernon laughed. He had his hand on the door of his study, and was still laughing as he opened it.

VIII

LORD ELYN went in first. I followed. The study was, as Vernon had said, a real work-room. There was little furniture in it, and what there was was plain and serviceable. Near the one window, which looked out at the back on to the backs of other houses, was a large writing-table covered with documents, pamphlets, magazines, address-books, gum-bottles, elastic bands, balls of string, a Remington typewriter, piles of paper bands for fastening newspapers and manuscripts, etc. In the midst of this ordered rummage stood a cabinet photograph of a man. I did not examine it then, but I knew later that it was Arthur Gernham, the notorious anti-vivisectionist. A few chairs, a thick Turkey carpet, and two revolving bookcases completed the furniture. The walls were tinted a dull red, and there were red curtains at the window. There were no pictures or ornaments. On the mantelpiece stood a clock which struck the quarter after six as we came in.

"Where's the—oh, there he is!" said Lord Elyn.

The black spaniel was lying crouched upon the floor in a corner near the window, a dark

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patch against the red of the curtain which touched him. He had been tied by a piece of cord to the writing-table, but had shrunk back, as if in an effort to escape, until he could go no farther. Now he lay with his face turned towards the door, motionless, staring. When we saw him he did not move. He only looked at us.

He only looked at us, I have said. Then why did Lord Elyn stop short just inside the door, as if startled? Why did I feel an almost invincible desire to get out of this room, even out of this house of my friend? It must have been the violence of terror in the dog's eyes contrasted with the absolute stillness, the stillness as of death, of his body. Yes, I think it must have been that which affected us. For in violence there is always contained the suggestion of intense activity, the suggestion of movement, and the dog's eyes conveyed to me the feeling that his soul was rushing from us, while his body lay there before us against the red curtain like a carven thing.

"There he is!" Lord Elyn repeated in a low voice.

He looked at me and then at Vernon. I thought he was going out of the room, and I am sure he wanted to do so; but he stood where he was in silence and again looked towards the spaniel.

"Well, what do you think of him?" asked Vernon.

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The sound of his voice perhaps made Lord Elyn conscious that we were behaving somewhat absurdly, that we were almost huddling together, he and I, beside the door. For he took a step—but only a step—forward, and answered, with an evident effort to speak more naturally:

“Oh, he looks a good specimen. He’s well bred; I should say, well bred—yes.”

Again he glanced at me as if questioning me. All this time the spaniel did not move, but lay staring at us with eyes full of horror. His stillness appalled me.

“And what do you think, Luttrell?” said Vernon.

It was with a difficulty that was extraordinary to me that I answered him.

“You’ll have a lot of trouble with him,” I said.

“Why?” said Vernon quickly.

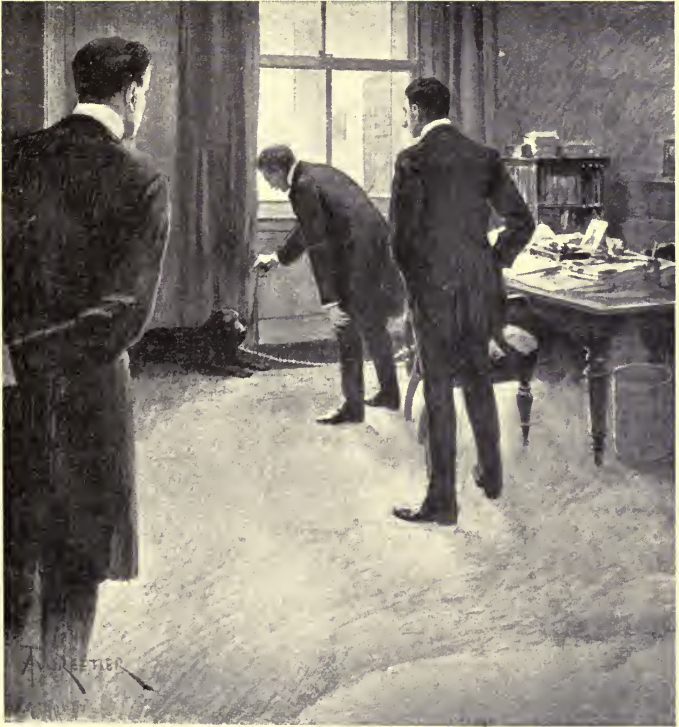
“Why? Why, he’s evidently a very nervous dog. I should think it’ll take time to reconcile him with his new home and his new master.”

“Good God!” said Lord Elyn.

As I finished speaking the dog had suddenly howled again. Involuntarily I stepped back.

Vernon laughed once more.

“Why, anybody would think you were afraid of him,” he said. “What’s the matter?”



"POOR BEAST! POOR BEAST!"

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I tried to laugh too—to laugh at myself.

“He gave tongue so very unexpectedly,” I said. “Poor fellow! Poor fellow!”

I was speaking to the dog, but I did not go towards him. The faint disgust with which he had already inspired me in the Park was stronger now that I was with him in a room. I was conscious of an almost invincible desire to go straight out of the house, to get into the open air, quickly, without delay. But with this feeling blended another, more subtle, one that surprised me by its force.

I longed, before I went, to untie that crouching dog, to let him escape from the room, the house, to set him free. With the disgust of him mingled a curious pity for him that was inexplicable to me then.

I think Lord Elyn shared my feelings, but he acted differently from me. For, whereas I now moved away to go, he suddenly, with determination, walked forward towards the spaniel. Seeing this, I stopped just outside the door in the corridor. From there I witnessed a sight that increased my sensation of pity, and at the same time deepened my sensation of disgust.

Lord Elyn, when he was near the spaniel, bent down a little, snapping his fingers and saying, “Poor beast! poor beast!” whereupon the dog suddenly sprang up from the floor against his breast, in an obvious attempt to nestle into his arms as if for protection

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against some danger. Lord Elyn, surprised, tried to hold him, but failed, and let him drop heavily to the floor.

Vernon interposed. Going forward quickly he said, "I'm awfully sorry, Lord Elyn. He's muddled you. Come out and Cragg shall brush it off."

The dog shrank back against the curtain.

"Oh, it doesn't matter," Lord Elyn began.

But Vernon took his arm and drew him with a sort of gentle inflexibility towards the door and into the corridor where I was standing.

"Cragg," Vernon called; "Cragg."

"Sir," said the man coming from the hall.

Vernon shut the door of the study sharply.

"Just get a brush, will you? The dog has put his dirty paws on Lord Elyn's coat."

"Certainly, Sir."

He turned on the electric light. Lord Elyn stood under it to be brushed. I noticed that his face looked very white, but thought it might be the effect of the light upon it. When Cragg had finished, Lord Elyn said—

"Good-night, Vernon," and walked hastily towards the hall door.

"May I come with you?" I said.

"Do."

I bade Vernon good-bye with a word and a hand-grasp, and in a moment Lord Elyn and I were out in the street.

"Ouf!" said Lord Elyn, blowing out his breath.

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He stood still, looking towards that part of the house which had been Deeming's.

"By Jove!" he said, as if speaking to himself.

Then, suddenly conscious that he was not alone, he exclaimed—

"Pray forgive me, Luttrell, but the fact is I—well, I don't know why, but that dog has made a very disagreeable impression on me, very disagreeable. D'you know, when he sprang upon me just now I felt a sensation—by Jove, it was a sensation of horror, of abject horror."

He walked on slowly.

"I noticed you were looking very pale in the hall," I said.

"Pale? I should think so! The whole business— I say, what did you think of it, eh?"

"How do you mean?" I asked evasively.

"What d'you think of the dog?"

"Poor beast! It seemed very nervous."

"Nervous! It was half-mad with terror. I never saw a dog in such a state before. And Vernon such a lover of animals, too! That's the strange part of it."

"You think it was Vernon it was afraid of?"

"To be sure. Didn't you see it spring upon me for protection, and directly he approached it shrank away like a thing demented? Now, I've been with animals all my life—brought

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up among 'em—and never before have I seen an animal's instinct betray it. Animals know in a second the men that are fond of 'em and the men who hate 'em. But this dog's all at sea. It thinks Vernon's a regular devil—a dog-torturer. It's half-crazed with fear of him. That is as plain as a pikestaff. The thing's unnatural, Luttrell—it's d——d unnatural!"

He spoke with a vehemence that showed how greatly his nerves were upset. I could not contradict, because I absolutely agreed with him.

"That dog," he added, "gives me the shudders."

"Poor wretch!" I said.

"You pity him too?" he asked.

"Yes. But when he gets to know Vernon it will be all right. Vernon has a positive passion for animals."

I strove to speak with conviction, for I was trying to convince myself.

"I know he has. And yet——"

He hesitated.

"What, Lord Elyn."

"Well, didn't it strike you that he looked at the dog very queerly?"

"Queerly?"

"Yes, not as if he had a great fancy for it."

I said nothing.

"What made him buy it?" said Lord Elyn.

"I've no idea," I answered.

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And indeed at that moment I was wondering, wondering almost passionately.

"I'll swear he doesn't like the dog," said Lord Elyn, still with vehemence. "He may be as fond of animals as you like, but he isn't fond of this one."

"If he hadn't taken a liking to it why should he buy it?"

"That's more than I can say. It's a queer business. I had an idea that—that you perhaps, had some inkling what was up."

And again his look questioned me.

"I haven't indeed," I said.

And I spoke the truth. I was in the dark, in blackness.

A hansom passed us slowly at this moment. Lord Elyn hailed it.

"I must get home," he said. "I'm dining out. Shall I give you a lift?"

"No, thank you. I'll walk. I like the exercise."

"Good-bye, then."

He stepped into the cab and drove off, while I walked slowly back to Albemarle Street.

Lord Elyn had made my thoughts clearer to me by his blunt expressions. He had asked me if I had any inkling of what was up, and, when he said that, I knew quite certainly that, to use that slangy phrase, I thought something was up. Vernon had been moved by some strange impulse to buy the black spaniel, had

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some strange purpose in connection with it. I felt sure of this. My instinct told me that it was so. What had caused this impulse? What was this purpose?

I wondered, but could not tell.

I reviewed Vernon's character as I knew it carefully, considered all that I had heard of him from others, trying to find a clue that would guide me to comprehension. But I remained perplexed. I knew good of him. I had always heard praise of him, except from one person, the man who was dead and in whose house he now lived. Deeming had said to me once that Vernon was a black fanatic; the phrase was strong, brutal even. It recurred to my mind as I walked, and stayed there. Then I thought of the terror in the spaniel's eyes as it lay motionless against the red curtain of the workroom. And I was troubled, I was strangely ill at ease. It seemed to me that in my friend, hidden away like a thing hidden in a cave, was something mysterious, something even terrible, and that the black spaniel was connected with it. But how could that be? Vernon loved all animals. He was at this very moment devoting his life to the advancement of their welfare. For them he had thrown off his long idleness of the lounging traveller, the luxurious art-lover, who wandered from country to country buying to please his whim. For them he stayed in England and lived laborious days. Why, then,

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when I thought of the spaniel shut up in his study, should I be chilled with fear? I reasoned with myself, but in vain. The sense of fear, of mystery, remained with me. It was deepened by an incident which occurred six days later.

During those days I had not seen Vernon; I had heard nothing of him or of the black spaniel.

The incident to which I alluded was my meeting for the first time with Arthur Gernham.

At a man's dinner, given by a famous throat-specialist renowned not only as a surgeon but as a host, I found myself sitting opposite to a very remarkable-looking man of about forty years of age. I had not been introduced to him, and had no idea who he was, but he at once attracted my attention by his air of fiery vitality and his unconventional attire. Instead of the ordinary evening dress, he wore a pair of black trousers, a loose silk shirt with a turned-down collar and very small black tie, and a double-breasted smoking-coat which concealed his waistcoat, if he had one. His powerful, sinewy wrists were unfettered by cuffs, and his powerful throat was free from the stiff linen ramparts over which the average Englishman faces the world in the evening. He was evidently a man who hated restraint. His face was pale, of the hatchet type, with a long hooked nose, the

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bridge of which was unusually marked; a large mouth, unsmiling but not unkind; a narrow, very high forehead, and gleaming hazel eyes. His head was sparsely covered with odd tufts of light-brown hair.

During dinner Gernham talked a great deal in a rasping voice. His conversation was interesting, for he was not only intelligent, but obviously an enthusiast, and one who was entirely fearless of the opinion of others. I wondered much who he was, and as we were getting up from the table I found an opportunity to ask my host.

"Arthur Gernham," he said. "Very down on us doctors, but an interesting fellow. In another age he'd have courted persecution for the faith that is in him. Let me introduce you."

And he did so.

Gernham shook me warmly by the hand.

"My dear colleague Kerstevan has often spoken of you," he said. "You sympathise with our efforts, don't you?"

He jerked his head upwards and looked at me keenly. I said something—I've forgotten what—and he continued abruptly—

"Come along. Let's have a good talk. Have a cigar."

He gave me a very large one, flung himself down in an armchair, and talked enthusiastically of Vernon.

"I've been almost living in his house this

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last week," he said. "We're preparing a fresh campaign on behalf of the blessed beasts, our brothers. We've got together some statistics that'll startle the comfortable elbow-chair Englishmen, I can tell you. I'll never rest till I've roused the country to the horrors that are being perpetrated every day, every hour, every minute, upon the defenceless animals God has committed to us to be good to. And Vernon—what a splendid chap he is! What a colleague! All pity! The man's made of pity, made of tenderness. Ah, but you know that!"

"Yes!" I said.

I thought of the black spaniel. Here was an opportunity to find out how Vernon and his pet were getting on together.

"You've been in the house with Vernon a great deal lately?" I began.

"Every day and all day," he said, "this last week."

"How's that new pet of his?" I asked. "Reconciled and happy in his new home?"

"Pet?" said Gernham.

"Yes, the dog."

"He hasn't got one. Don't you know the hideous story? He once had a spaniel called——"

"I know," I interrupted. "And he's got another."

"Not he!" rejoined Gernham, with sledgehammer certainty. "He'll never have an-

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other. I understand the poor chap's feelings. At the same time——”

But here I interrupted again, and told Gernham the story of Vernon's acquisition of the spaniel. He heard me with an amazement he did not try to conceal.

“And you mean to say the dog's in the house now?” he cried, when I had finished.

“I suppose so, unless he's got rid of it already.”

Gernham sat quite still with his thin hands spread out on his knees staring at me hard.

“This is extraordinary,” he said at last, with a sort of biting decision.

“You mean that he didn't mention the fact that he had a dog?”

“I mean more than that. I mean that he concealed it from me.”

“Concealed it?”

“Certainly. I've got any amount of animals—dogs, cats, the whole show—and I'm always urging Kersteven to set up a happy family. We preach kindness, he and I. We ought to practise it actively as much as we can. But his feelings about his dead dog have always stood in the way. I'm perpetually trying to convert him to my view. I've been at it this week.”

“And he said he hadn't a dog?”

“No. But he never said he had one. It's much the same thing under the circumstances.

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I should never have thought Kersteven could be deceitful. I don't like it. I—I hate it!”

At this moment we were interrupted. Two of the other men came up and we had no more private talk that evening. When I was going away Gernham said—

“Come and see me—will you? Here's my card.”

He gave it to me, shook my hand, and as I turned to go said—

“You've spoilt my evening, I can tell you that.”

I thought, “And you've spoilt mine,” but I did not say it.

IX

I WENT home that night wondering whether Vernon had got rid of the black spaniel. Perhaps he had found it impossible to reconcile it to its new quarters, and had sold it or given it back to the man with the fur cap. Or perhaps it was still in the house. If that were so, it was very strange, very unlike Vernon to have concealed the fact from Arthur Gernham. But, in either case, he had been deceitful, deliberately deceitful, with a friend, and a friend whom he greatly admired and respected.

This incident of my meeting with Gernham deepened my sense of fear, of mystery. My instinct—I now felt sure of it—was right. Some strange under side of Vernon's character was active at this moment. I knew him only in part; much of him I did not know. A stranger now seemed to confront me in the night, a stranger by whose feet crouched something black and terrified. What was this stranger's purpose? What could it be?

I reviewed carefully my whole acquaintance with Vernon, but especially the latter part of my acquaintance with him, when Deeming was in relation with us both. It was then, when

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Deeming came into his life, and only then, that Vernon had shown me for the first time a man in him whose presence I had not suspected, whose exact nature I did not know. This man was roused by Deeming. I should have let him sleep. But, having been roused, he had surely been sleepless ever since. Yes, that was so. Thus far, things were clear to me. Something—the strange man in Vernon—had been wakeful, ardent ever since, was wakeful, ardent now. This man it was who worked shoulder to shoulder with Gernham. This man it was who had bought the black spaniel.

So far, light. But now came the darkness. What had been Vernon's purpose in buying the black spaniel? When he saw it he had looked at it fatally. At that moment, while he looked at it, his purpose had sprung up full-grown in his mind, full-grown and fierce. I was not to know that purpose. Arthur Gernham was not to know it. He now had some purpose in connection with an animal that Arthur Gernham, his close friend and colleague, his leader in a campaign of kindness, of pity, to which he was dedicating all his activities and giving all his enthusiasm, was not to know or even suspect. That purpose, since it was in connection with an animal, must surely be one of kindness, of pity.

But here my instinct rebelled violently against my knowledge of Vernon. My instinct said that it was not so; that Vernon's

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purpose in buying the black spaniel had been sad, even perhaps terrible. Yet how could that be?

The dog's eyes haunted me. They seemed to me to know what I did not know, to know what Vernon's purpose was.

Deeming—again I thought of him, of Vernon's short and strange connection with him. Once Vernon had said to me that he believed Deeming was a man haunted by a mania for persecution. He had spoken without knowledge then. Later, he had travelled to England to gain knowledge. He had taken the house in Wimpole Street to gain knowledge. Had he gained it? I did not know. Vernon had never told me. Was that why I was in the dark now? It began to seem to me that, perhaps, if I could find out what Vernon knew of Deeming I should understand something of his present purpose, of his purpose in buying the black spaniel.

At this stage in my mental debate I reached the Piccadilly corner of Albemarle Street, and was just going to turn towards my house, when a familiar face, a face respectable, close-shaven, English, looked upon me in the lamplight, and a bowler hat was deferentially lifted.

"Cragg!" I said.

"Good-night, Sir," said Cragg. "A fine night, Sir."

"Yes—wait a minute, Cragg."

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“Certainly, Sir.”

Vernon’s man stood still.

“Just walk with me to my door, will you?”

“With pleasure, Sir.”

We turned side by side into the comparative quiet of Albemarle Street.

“How is Mr. Kersteven, Cragg?”

“Well, Sir——” The man slightly hesitated. “Oh, Sir, he’s in his usual health, I think.”

“Working hard, isn’t he?”

“Very hard, Sir.”

“With Mr. Gernham.”

“Yes, Sir, with Mr. Gernham.”

“And—and how’s the dog, Cragg?”

I looked at him as I spoke, and saw his forehead contract.

“The dog, Sir?—oh, the dog is getting on all right so far as I am aware.”

“How do you mean—so far as you are aware?”

“Well, Sir, I don’t see much of it. That’s a fact.”

“Really. How’s that?”

I was pumping the man, I acknowledge it. I can make no excuse for it. I was driven by something that seemed to me then more than an ignoble curiosity.

“Well, Sir, Mr. Kersteven keeps the dog shut up mostly. I suppose he thinks that till it gets accustomed to the place and to us it’s better.”

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"But if it's always shut up, how can it get accustomed to you?"

"That's more than I can say, Sir."

I could see that the man was constrained, was not telling me something of which his mind was full. We had now reached my door, and I had no further excuse for keeping him with me.

"Well, Cragg," I said. "Good-night."

"Good-night, Sir."

"I hope the dog will settle down and be friendly with you."

"Friendly with me, Sir! That dog! The Lord forbid!" cried Cragg.

He seemed startled by the sound of his own lamentable exclamation, looked at me as if asking pardon, lifted his hat, and walked quickly away into the darkness. I stood staring after him. I longed to follow him, to question him, to find out what he meant. But how could I?

That night it was late before I went to sleep. The black spaniel seemed to be crouching at the foot of the bed. I seemed to see its yellow eyes fixed upon me, trying to tell me what I longed to know.

Late in the afternoon of the next day I received a very unexpected visit from Arthur Gernham. When I saw him come into my room, dressed in a suit of homespun, with a flannel shirt and a red tie, and holding a soft brown wideawake in his hand, I jumped up

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from my chair eagerly. I guessed at once that he had something to say with reference to our conversation of the previous night.

"How are you?" he said, in his rasping, energetic voice. "I got your address from the Red Book."

He sat down and stretched out his long legs.

"I'm delighted to see you," I said. "You've been at work with Vernon?"

"I've been with him."

He ran one hand over his tufts of scanty hair.

"I'm disappointed in Kersteven," he said. "I never should have thought he was a shifty fellow."

The word shifty, applied to Vernon, roused my sense of friendship.

"Oh, you're mistaken," I exclaimed. "Vernon's not a shifty man."

"I beg your pardon—he is."

I waited in silence for him to explain himself. I saw plainly that he was going to. There was a sledge-hammer honesty about Gernham that was startling but rather refreshing. He now proceeded to give me a specimen of it.

"I can't stomach a friend who isn't perfectly straight with me," he said; "and what's more, I'm bound to tell him so. I can't keep anything in. Whatever I feel I have to out with it. That's my nature. It's got me into

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plenty of trouble, and it will get me into plenty more. Fights were my lot at Eton, and fights have been my lot, more or less, ever since."

He unbuttoned one of the cuffs of his flannel shirt, pushed the flannel higher up his arm, and went on:

"With Kersteven I got on magnificently until to-day."

"Have you had a wordy fight with Vernon to-day, then?" I asked.

"I went straight to him this morning and told him I'd met you last night. He asked me how I liked you, and I told him, 'Very much.' Then I said, plump out, 'You've been tricky with me, Kersteven.'"

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

He took no notice of my interruption, and went on—

"'You've let me make a fool of myself with you. That's nothing. One makes a fool of oneself most days one way or another.' 'What do you mean?' he asked. 'That you've allowed me to think that you would never keep a dog or animal of any kind in your house, that you've sat here and listened to me trying to persuade you to keep one, while all the time there is—or was—one perhaps within a few feet of me. You've let me think what wasn't true, you've made me think what wasn't true. I don't know what your reason is, but I know that I hate your action, and that I

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never thought you were capable of doing such a low thing to a friend.' ”

“ Pretty strong,” I said. “ How did he take it? ”

“ That's the nastiest part of all. He took it lying down.”

“ Lying down? ”

“ Yes. Merely said the matter of the dog was such a trifle he hadn't thought it would interest me to know of it, that he wasn't sure of keeping it for any time, that he'd been so busy with me that—etc., etc. The lamest excuses man ever offered to man. I was disgusted, and showed it. It's my way to show things—can't help doing it. ‘ Let's get to work,’ he said, trying to change the subject. ‘ No,’ I said. ‘ I can't work with you to-day. That's certain.’ And I took up my hat and went.”

“ And you—you didn't see the dog? ”

“ Oh, dear no. But it wasn't that I cared about.”

“ I wish you had seen it. I wish you would see it.”

I was speaking almost involuntarily, as if the words were forced from me, words scarcely prompted by any thought in me, words that were uttered for me.

“ Why? ” he asked. “ Why? What do you mean? ”

His face and manner were always alert, but now they had suddenly become intense with a sort of quivering vivacity.

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"What's wrong about the dog?"

"I don't know that anything is wrong."

"Know! Do you suspect anything is wrong?"

I waited a minute. I was repeating to myself Gernham's question.

"Yes," I said at last, "I do. But I don't know why I suspect, and I don't know what I suspect. That's the honest truth and vague enough. But I can't help it."

He looked me straight in the eyes for a full minute, I should think. Then he said—

"I want you to be less vague, Luttrell; and I think you can. A man doesn't say such a thing as you've said without more meaning than you've acknowledged."

"I assure you——" I began.

But he stopped me.

"Now look here," he said. "One often has a thought behind one's thought, like a body behind its shadow. You've found the shadow; now look for the body, and I'll bet you'll find that too."

His words seemed to clear away some mystery from my mind, but I shrank from what was now revealed—the body behind the shadow.

"I see you know now what you suspect," he said, still looking into my eyes with intensity. "What is it?"

"I do know now," I answered. "But it's monstrous, and upon my word I'm ashamed to

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say it. For you must know that I've a great regard for Vernon."

"And so have—or had—I. His tenderness for the suffering of the animal world drew me to him. I can't forget that even now, after this beastly affair of the dog."

"His tenderness for the animal world," I repeated. "It's just that—just my knowledge of that, which makes my suspicion so monstrous."

"Let's have it, I must have it!" he said. "You're no backbiter, you're an honest fellow. I can see that. Go ahead. I shan't mistake your motives."

There was a compelling frankness about him. I yielded to it.

"My suspicion is that perhaps Vernon is being cruel to that dog," I said.

Gernham sat quite still. I saw that my words had deeply astonished him. But he did not burst forth, as many another man would have done, in a denial of the possibility of my suspicion being roused by a horrid fact, being well founded. He was a very quick man, and full of finesse despite his bluntness.

"What are your reasons?" he said slowly.

"I can scarcely say I have any. Let me think, though."

After a minute I described to him minutely how Vernon had regarded the spaniel in the Park, the dog's fear there, its much greater

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terror on being brought into the house in Wimpole Street, Vernon's strange excitement on its arrival, and excitement in which there seemed to be an admixture of triumph, his laughter as he opened the door of the room in which the spaniel was confined; the dog's rush for safety to Lord Elyn, and shrinking away when Vernon approached it. When I had finished, I added—

“There's one thing more.”

“What is it?”

Then I related to him my meeting with Cragg on the previous night, and what the man had told me about Vernon's keeping the spaniel perpetually shut up.

“That's all,” I ended. “Not much, is it?”

“D' you know,” he said, “what's far the most striking fact in all that you've told me?”

“What?” I asked.

“The dog's horror of Kersteven. The rest may be nothing—fancy of yours or oddity of manner on Kersteven's part. But the dog's horror of Kersteven is very strange, and—unless your suspicion is correct, which God forbid—very unnatural.”

“Unnatural—that's just what Lord Elyn called it.”

“Ah!”

“And his trying to keep the fact of the dog being in the house from you. Isn't that very strange?”

“Certainly it is. But—by Jove!—the

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strangest thing of all would be that Kersteven should be cruel to an animal."

"Yes, that's true. I can't—no, I can't believe it possible."

"What could be his motive?"

"I can't conceive."

"I know the man. He has a passion of pity in him for the sufferings of the animals, a real passion. Only one thing could account for his being cruel, deliberately and persistently cruel, to a dog."

"What?"

"If he were mad."

"Oh, that—impossible!"

"It would be the only thing," he repeated. "I know something of insanity. A chief feature of it is this, that it often creates in a man the reverse of what he was before it took possession of him. Thus the kind, sane man becomes the cruel madman; the lively, mercurial sane man the bitter, melancholy madman—and so on. You take me?"

"Vernon isn't mad," I said with conviction.

"Then he isn't being cruel to his dog," he said with equal conviction.

"I can't understand it," I said dubiously.

"The whole thing's a mystery. Why should he buy the dog after swearing he would never have another? A whim, he said it was, a caprice. But I don't believe that. No, there was some deeper, stranger reason. What could it be?"

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I was asking myself, not him.

Gernham got up to go.

“One thing I promise you,” he said. “I’ll set at rest your doubts in a very short time. I’ll find out for certain that Kersteven is treating that dog properly. I devote my life to our dumb friends, as you know. Well, they shan’t find me wanting now, though a man who has been my chum and my colleague is concerned in this matter.”

“What are you going to do?”

“To-morrow I ought to be working with Kersteven. After to-day I didn’t mean to go, I didn’t feel as if I could go. But now I will, and I’ll see the spaniel and see him with Kersteven. Never fear!”

He spoke with biting decision. I looked at him and felt that he would do what he said.

“Brush my suspicions away,” I said, “and I’ll be only too thankful. Good-bye.”

He went off quickly.

When the door was shut behind him I thought how strange it was that Gernham’s purpose in connection with Vernon was exactly the same as had been Vernon’s in connection with Deeming when he left Rome for London.

He had wanted to see a black spaniel with Deeming. Gernham wanted to see a black spaniel with him.

X

JUST before lunch the next day Gernham was announced.

"Good morning," he said, coming into the room close upon the heels of my man. "Can I lunch with you?"

"Certainly. Lunch for two, Bates."

"Yes, Sir."

The man went out and shut the door. Then I turned to Gernham.

"You've been to Wimpole Street?" I asked.

"Yes. Do you remember I told you yesterday that Kersteven had taken my punishment lying down?"

"Of course I do."

"Well, since then he's thought it over, and got up."

"What do you mean?"

"Yesterday I declined to work with him. To-day, he's declined to work with me. He's refused me admittance to his house. See that!"

He put a note down on the table beside me. I took it and read as follows:

DEAR GERNHAM—I don't know whether you will come to-day; but should you do so, I've told Cragg to give you this. I did not care to quarrel with a man in my own

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house; and so yesterday, when you were impertinent to me, I did not appear to resent it. As you know, I admire your character and respect your enthusiasm, and it has been a great pleasure to me to be associated with you in a work which I love with my whole heart and soul. But I allow no man to criticise my conduct as you have chosen to criticise it. I am sorry, therefore, that unless you feel inclined to apologise, I cannot admit you to my house.—Believe me, faithfully,

VERNON KERSTEVEN.

“What do you think of that, eh?” asked Gernham, when I finished reading the note. “Pretty blunt, isn’t it?”

“Vernon has decidedly got up,” I said.

I looked again at the note.

“Tell me just what you think,” Gernham said.

“Well,” I answered, with some hesitation, “it’s an abrupt change of front after his behaviour yesterday.”

“Too abrupt,” he said. “I don’t like it; I don’t like it at all. You were right, Luttrell; there is a mystery here—a mystery connected with that dog. But I haven’t got your opinion yet!”

He was a persistent man, and did not readily lose sight of his object.

“You want to know how I explain Vernon’s change of front.”

“Exactly.”

“It seems to me that he has thought things over since yesterday, and resolved to avail him-

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self of this pretext to keep you out of his house."

"That's it!" exclaimed Gernham. "I've given him his opportunity like a fool, and he's taken it, like a clever man. But where an animal is concerned I'm not so easily dished. A good many people who've appeared in the London police-courts know that."

"When you got this note, what did you do?"

"I tried to question Cragg."

"And the result?"

"Nil. Directly I mentioned the dog, he looked as grim as death, and became monosyllabic. There's something up, and Cragg has an inkling of it. But he'll never tell it to me. You've got to go into this, Luttrell."

At this moment lunch was announced, and the rest of the conversation took place in the dining-room. Directly after lunch Gernham hurried away, leaving me pledged to act where he could not act, pledged to probe to the bottom, and without delay, the mystery of the black spaniel.

My relation with Vernon was now almost exactly similar to his former relation with Deeming, and Gernham was to be the inactive watcher, the waiter on events engineered by others, that I had formerly been. But there was a difference in this new situation which had followed so strangely upon the death of Deeming. Vernon had never been Deeming's

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friend. From the first moment when they met the two men had been instinctively hostile to one another. But I was Vernon's friend. I cared for him. Till now I had believed in him. This fact complicated matters painfully. And yet I did not hesitate, did not feel that in my understanding with Gernham I was being treacherous, disloyal.

For the eyes of the black spaniel haunted me, summoned me, seemed to force me to go on, to investigate this mystery. By them I was driven to do as I did. By them I was told that in my friend a new man, a stranger, had arisen, and that in attacking this stranger—if attack were necessary—I should not be false to my friendship with the man who had lived in Rome, the quiet lover of pictures, the gentle, idle, cultivated Vernon of the Trinità dei Monti.

Vernon was generally at home after six in the evening. I resolved to seek him at that hour on the same day, and carried my resolution into effect. Cragg opened the door to me.

"Mr. Kersteven at home, Cragg?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Can I see him?"

"If you'll wait a moment, Sir, I'll ask."

He paused, then added in explanation—

"I don't think Mr. Kersteven is very well to-day, Sir. Perhaps he may not wish to be disturbed, even by you. You'll excuse me, Sir."

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"Of course. Go and see. I'll stay here."

"Pray take a seat, Sir."

He placed a chair for me in the little hall, and went discreetly away up the stairs.

I sat down and waited.

The hall was quiet and dim. Somewhere a large clock was ticking. Now and then I heard a carriage roll by outside. As I sat there I fell into deep thought. What was I going to do? I had come to the house without making any plan. I could not make any plan till I had seen Vernon. His demeanour, his action, must guide me. Would he see me? I thought it probable. There was evidently no one with him. Had there been, Cragg would have told me; and, if I saw him, should I find the black spaniel with him? I glanced round me. On the opposite side of the hall, close to where I was sitting, opened the short corridor, or passage, which linked the two houses in one. I could see the darkness of what had been Deeming's house where the passage stretched away beyond the door of Vernon's workroom. Poor Deeming! Gone, with all his fine abilities, his energy, his persistence, his ambition—his cruelty, perhaps! Had he been cruel? Possibly Vernon knew. If he had, he was perhaps now being punished in that other mysterious world of which we know nothing, of which we seldom think in health, but which seems to loom near us when we are ill, or weary, or in trouble of mind—to loom as a great vault be-

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fore whose entrance we stand, gazing but seeing naught. As I stared down the corridor into the dimness of the other house, the thought of Deeming haunted me, came to me vividly, till I almost fancied that something of him, some thrown-out essence of his personality, of his strong soul, still remained in the dwelling that had been his, still knew what went on there, still watched the coming and going of the man who governed where he had governed once.

I fancied, did I say? It was more than that. I felt as if he were near me, as if he were even intent upon me.

Then from the thought of him, and still with that sensation of his nearness, of his attention, upon me, my mind travelled to the black spaniel. His dog, that mysterious creature never seen by me, had pattered in the dimness towards which I was gazing. And now, as Deeming's place was taken by Vernon, its place was taken by the black spaniel Vernon had first seen in the Park cowering down against the earth, its ears laid back, its body trembling, its eyes full of a message of voiceless fear. Perhaps it was close to me now, this successor of Deeming's pet or victim. Perhaps it was shut up in the room in which I had seen it lying against the red curtain. I could see the door of the room. It was shut. A few steps would bring me to it. I glanced towards the staircase. Cragg was not coming down.

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I got up. Again I had the sensation that Deeming was near me, was intent upon me, wanted something of me, and with this sensation was mysteriously linked my consciousness of the nearness of the black spaniel, till—till the two sensations seemed to merge the one into the other, to become one, in some indefinable, fantastic way. I can hardly explain exactly what I felt at this moment, but my feeling was connected with Vernon's workroom. It was as if—as if I almost knew that, did I but take those few steps to the shut door, did I but open that door, I should find awaiting me within the room not only the black spaniel, but the dead man, Deeming, with it. It was as if—as if——

I moved across the hall, walking softly, reached the corridor, gained the door, stood by it, listening for the uneasy movement, for the whimper of a dog, for the stir, for the murmur of a dead man. But there was no sound within. There was no sound, and yet I felt positive that the spaniel was inside the room, separated from me only by a piece of wood. Once, twice, I put my fingers upon the handle of the door, yet refrained from turning it. I felt a strong desire to open the door, yet at the critical moment I was held back from doing so by an imperious reluctance which seemed to me to be physical, as if my body sickened and protested against what my mind told it to do.

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How long I stood thus uncertainly before the door I do not know. It seemed to me a very long time. At last—in the struggle between mind and body, if it were that—the body conquered. I turned to move away without opening the door. I even took a step towards the hall. But I was arrested by a sound that startled me, that sent—I could not tell why—a chill through me.

I heard the scratching of a dog against the inside of the door.

I stood still, held my breath, and listened. The scratching was repeated, prolonged. It was gentle, surreptitious almost, yet insistent, a summons to me to return.

Again my body sickened. I was physically afflicted. Nausea seized me. But now my mind rose up and protested against the condition, against the domination of my body, like a thing angry and ashamed. Suddenly I took a resolution. I would open the door without delay in answer to the appeal of the black spaniel. Swiftly I went back to the door, grasped the handle, turned it, pushed. The door resisted me. It was locked. As I realised this I heard from within the desolate whining of a dog imprisoned.

“Luttrell! Luttrell!”

Vernon's voice called to me from above, and at the same time I heard a footstep. Cragg was coming down. I moved swiftly back into the hall and met him. He glanced at me in-

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quiringly, looked down the passage, then at me again. His face for an instant was eloquent with inquiry—with—was it sympathy? Then he was once more the discreet servant, saying in a formal voice—

“Please come up, Sir; Mr. Kerstevan will be very glad to see you.”

Vernon met me on the landing by the drawing-room door. I saw at once that he was not well. His face was very pale, and had a peculiar look, as if the skin were drawn upward towards the wrinkled forehead, which I had sometimes noticed in people suffering from prolonged insomnia. It gave a horribly strained appearance to his countenance, in which the eyes looked unnaturally eager and full of curious observation.

“Were you in the hall?” he said, taking my hand for the fraction of an instant, and then dropping it as if with relief.

“I waited in the hall,” I replied evasively.

“You were there then while Cragg was up here?”

“He asked me to wait there,” I said. “While he went to see if you were well enough to receive me. I’m sorry to hear you’re seedy.”

“Oh, it’s of no consequence. Come in.”

We went into the drawing-room.

“What’s been the matter?” I asked, as we sat down.

“Oh, I don’t know. I’ve been overworking, I suppose.”

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“With Gernham?” I said.

“Gernham!”—he looked at me narrowly.

“You—have you seen Gernham to-day?”

“Yes.”

“Oh.”

He sat silent for a moment. I could see that he was hesitating whether to tell me about his breach with Gernham or not.

“How d’you like Gernham?” he said at length. “He likes you. He told me so.”

“I know him very slightly, but one can’t help respecting such a genuine fellow,” I replied.

“Genuine—yes, he’s that.”

“If he undertook a thing, nothing would stop him from going through with it.”

“You think so?”

He slightly smiled.

“But suppose he were to encounter an opposition as thorough as his own attack? What then?”

I knew at once that he was thinking of Gernham and himself.

“Then,” I said, “there would be a battle royal.”

“A battle royal, would there? Yes, no doubt.”

With the last words his interest seemed to fail suddenly. He slightly drooped his head, and sat like one listening for some distant sound. I watched him closely. Gernham’s declaration that if Vernon were maltreating

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the spaniel he must be mentally diseased was present in my mind. I was looking for symptoms that would guide me to a conclusion one way or the other. I saw a great change in Vernon—a painful change. He looked like a man suffering under some terrible distress, which had altered, for the time, his whole outlook upon life. But I felt that I was with a perfectly sane man. As I regarded him he seemed to recover his consciousness of my presence, glanced up, and met my scrutiny.

“What is it?” he said. “Why do you look at me like that?”

I felt embarrassed.

“What’s Gernham been saying to you?” he added sharply.

“Gernham — oh, you know him,” I answered. “You know where his heart is, with the animals. What an enthusiast he is!”

“He’s been talking to you about his work then. Well, did he tell you that we’ve had a quarrel, he and I?”

“He said your work together had come to a stop, for the moment. Why should it?”

“Why? Oh, well, sometimes Gernham is too blunt, says more than he, than any man ought to say to another. There is a limit to frankness; occasionally he oversteps it. He overstepped it with me, and I resented it. Don’t you think I was right?”

I felt that he was being strangely insincere

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with me as he had been insincere with Gernham, trying to raise a cloud which would obscure the reality of his mind, the true scope of his intentions.

"I see no reason why two such men as you should quarrel," I answered. "Especially if it interrupts, and perhaps, to some extent, cripples a splendid work. You should sink your little differences, and go on together, hand in hand, to further the noble cause you love."

He had been trying to play me. I was now trying to play him. Yet, as I finished, a genuine warmth came, I think, into my voice. It moved him. I could see that, for he looked up at me as if demanding my sympathy. Suddenly I felt a profound pity for him, a profound desire to help him. But how? Against what?

"Perhaps we shall be friends again," he said. "But he misunderstands me, and you, Luttrell, perhaps you misunderstand me too."

"I!"

"Yes—you. Are you sure that, in these last days, you have never had any cruel suspicions of me? Are you sure you have not any cruel suspicions of me now?"

"If I had, if I have, you could easily clear them up," I answered. "By the way, how's the dog getting on? All right?"

His face changed at once, hardened.

"Oh, yes!" he said.

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"I should like to have another look at him," I said. "Where is he?"

"He's downstairs in the study. Didn't you know it?"

"I—I did think I heard something scratching and whining. Why do you keep him shut up?"

"He hasn't got accustomed to being with me yet. If I let him out he might bolt."

"Oh!"

"I don't want to have spent my twelve pounds for nothing," he added.

His face had hardened. Now his voice was hard too—hard and fatal.

"May I have a look at him?" I said.

The sense of mystery was returning upon me. I tried to combat it by speaking bluntly, expressing my desire plainly. At least, I would no longer deal in subterfuge. Instead of answering my question he said, throwing a curious, wavering glance upon me, "Are you engaged to-night?"

I was, but I said at once, "I'm entirely at your service, Vernon."

"Dine with me, then."

"Here?"

"Yes, here."

"Certainly."

"That's right. And now let's have some music. I've got a new piano since last year."

We spent the next hour with Richard Strauss and Saint-Saëns.

XI

NIGHT had closed in. Vernon and I were seated opposite to one another at the oval dining-table. Cragg waited upon us. Now and then, as he moved softly to and fro, I glanced at him, and I thought I detected in his well-trained face a flicker of anxiety as his eyes rested upon his master, a flicker of appeal as they rested upon me. It seemed to me at such times that he wanted me to do something to help Vernon, that he was longing to have a word with me alone.

The dinner was excellent, but Vernon ate scarcely anything. He talked, however, a good deal, though hardly with his usual nerve and relish. When dessert was on the table, he said—

“Bring us our coffee here, Cragg; at least, one black coffee.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I won’t take it,” Vernon said to me. “I’ve been sleeping wretchedly lately. Morphia would be more the thing for me than coffee.”

“I knew you had been suffering from insomnia.”

He laughed drearily.

“I don’t look up to much, do I?”

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Cragg brought my coffee and cigars.

"You can leave us now, Cragg; go and have your supper; go downstairs."

The man looked slightly surprised, but said nothing and went away.

When he had gone Vernon lit a cigar, puffed out some rings of smoke, watched them curling up towards the ceiling, then said—

"You wanted to have a look at the spaniel, didn't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well, if I bring him in, be careful with him, will you?"

"Careful with him! Why? Is he dangerous?"

"I don't say that. But he's got an odd temper. I keep him muzzled."

"In the house?"

"Yes, always. I don't want to be bitten. You remember how Deeming died? Well, I don't want to die like that."

His mention of Deeming gave me an opportunity of which I at once availed myself.

"That was a sad business," I said. "Did you see much of him before he died, as you were living next door?"

"Oh," he interrupted, "Deeming was not a friendly neighbour. Do you know that I took your advice?"

"What advice?"

"To get into his house as a patient."

"You really did that!"

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"Yes. One morning, as he never invited me in as a friend, I went in as a patient."

"How did he take it?"

"Well, he could hardly decline to treat me. It happened that I was really unwell at the time, so I had a good excuse."

"And—and—your strange suspicions"—I was almost stammering, conscious, painfully conscious of my own—"your strange suspicions—did you ever find out whether they were justified?"

"They were justified, fully justified. But the dog took its own part in the end and killed its persecutor."

I felt a sensation of horror take hold upon me.

"Do you really mean that Deeming was treating his spaniel cruelly?" I asked.

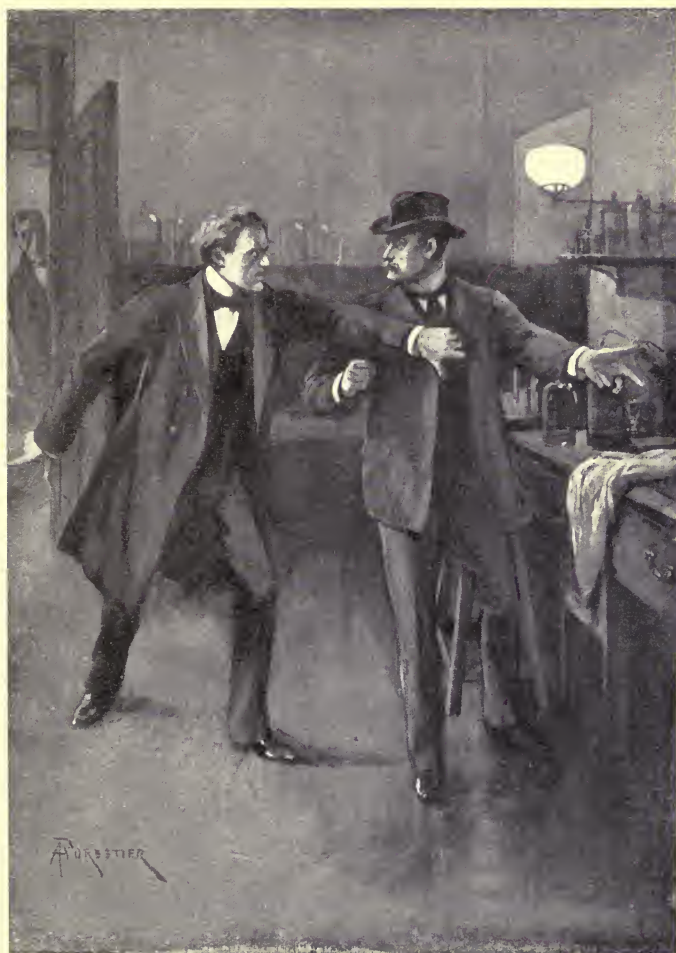
"I do. He had the mania for persecution that I suspected. He was venting it upon his dog. The servants had some inkling of the truth, especially his butler. He knew, I believe, all that was going on. But—he was well paid, very well paid."

I remembered my Sunday morning call, and the butler's exclamation when the fox-terrier ran into the house.

"This is horrible, Vernon," I said. "Are you sure of what you say?"

"Quite sure. I heard—well, I heard things at night, and at last I saw the dog."

"How?"



"WHILE I WAS THERE DEEMING CAME BACK UNEXPECTEDLY."



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"I got into the house when Deeming was out. I bribed his butler, paid him more than Deeming did, I suppose. Anyhow, I got in. I think the man was sympathetic; was anxious really that an end should be put to the disgusting business. I burst open the door of the room in which the spaniel was confined, and then I saw—no matter what. It was quite enough. While I was there Deeming came back unexpectedly."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "What a ghastly situation!"

"It was not exactly pleasant. I saw the man's soul naked that night—stark naked. It was on that occasion the dog bit him."

"Ouf!" I said.

Again nausea seized me.

Vernon looked at me steadily.

"Don't you think Deeming deserved anything he got?" he asked. "Anything he could ever get?"

"But he was mad—he must have been mad!"

"I suppose that sort of thing is what might be called a form of madness. Unfortunately a good many sane people have it—people as sane as you or I in all other respects."

When he said the words "or I" a flush, I think, came to my cheek. It seemed to me that he spoke with significance—as if he knew what Gernham and I had spoken of the day before.

"As sane as you or I," he repeated. "This work I've been doing with Gernham has

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opened my eyes to a good deal in human nature that they were shut to before. I once said to you in Rome, to you and Deeming, that man's cruelty sprang often from a lack of imagination. Sometimes it springs from just the opposite, from a diseased imagination that lusts for gratification in ways we won't discuss."

"But Deeming—that he should be such a man, he whose profession it was to make whole!"

"Yes, that made the thing more strange and, to him, more enticing."

"Enticing!" I exclaimed.

My voice was full of the bitterness of disgust mingled with incredulity that I was feeling.

"Just that," he said. "He healed, as it were, with one hand, and destroyed with the other. Deeming was one of the human devils who have an insatiable craze for contrast. They revel in virtue because it is so different from vice. They revel in vice because it is so different from virtue. Deeming quivered with happiness when the last patient was gone and he could steal to the room where the spaniel——"

"Enough! Enough!" I exclaimed. "I won't hear any more! Thank God he's dead! Thank God it's all over now! Why did you do that?" Vernon had suddenly laughed.

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“Why did you do that?” I repeated.
“What is there to laugh at?”

“I was laughing at your certainty, Luttrell, at the calm assurance with which we—poor, ignorant beings that we are—assert this or that regarding the fate of a soul, without knowing anything of the purposes of the Creator.”

“I don’t understand.”

“And yet you say—‘Thank God, it’s all over now!’”

He looked at me so strangely that I was struck to silence. I opened my lips to speak, but, while his eyes were upon me, I could say nothing. He made me feel as if, indeed, I were plunged in a profound gulf of ignorance, as if he watched me there from some height of understanding, of knowledge.

“Now I’ll go and fetch the spaniel,” he said.

And he got up and quietly left the room.

I turned in my chair and sat facing the door. The room was softly lit by wax candles, and on the walls were the pictures of gentleness, of mercy, of goodness and adoration which had hung upon the walls of Vernon’s dining-room in Rome. My glance ran over them, while my mind dwelt upon the horrors of Vernon’s narrative—horrors that seemed all the greater because he had told me so little, had left my imagination so unfettered. Then I looked again towards the door, and listened intently. Presently I heard a door shut, the sound of a

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step. Vernon was coming with the spaniel. I had asked to see the dog; I had wished to see it. Yet now my wish was about to be gratified I felt an extreme repugnance invade me. I longed to escape from the fulfilment of my wish. I was seized with—was it fear? It was something cold, something that lay upon my nerves like ice, that surely turned the blood in my veins to water. But, I could do nothing now, nothing to escape. Something within me seemed to make a furious effort to take up some weapon and attack the cold heavy thing that was striving to paralyse me. I was conscious of battle. In the midst of the battle the door opened and Vernon came in.

He was carrying the black spaniel in his arms.

He walked in slowly, kicked the door backwards with his heel to shut it, came to the table and sat down, still keeping the dog in his arms.

The dog was muzzled, and had on a collar to which a steel chain was attached; but, for the first moment, the only thing that struck me was his thinness. He was excessively thin—almost emaciated. He sat on his master's knee, with his chin on the edge of the table and his yellow eyes gazing at me. A long trembling ran through his body, ceased, and was renewed with a regularity that reminded me of the ticking of a clock. Vernon kept his two hands upon the spaniel. They shuddered on the dog's back when he shuddered.

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"Well," Vernon said. "What do you think of him?"

"He's horribly thin," I said. "Horribly."

I turned my eyes from the spaniel to Vernon's face.

"Do you think——" I began and hesitated.

"What?" he asked calmly.

"Do you think you give him enough to eat?" I said.

"Oh, it's very bad for dogs to overfeed," he answered. "Nothing ruins their health like overeating, and spaniels are like pugs, inclined to be greedy."

I noticed that he had not answered my question.

He lifted one hand, laid it on the spaniel's head, and smoothed the black hair, moving his hand backwards to the neck. The dog turned its head back towards him and showed his white teeth, as if his master's hand drew him but to a demonstration of hatred, not of affection. Vernon smiled, lifted his hand, and repeated the action. The dog gave a low growl ending in a whine.

"Now you haven't told me what you think of him," Vernon continued, "and I want to know. I want very much to know."

I looked into the spaniel's eyes, and again something cold lay upon my nerves like ice.

"Why?" I said. "What does it matter what I think?"

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"Do answer my question!" Vernon said with unwonted irritation.

"There's something about the dog," I said, "that's—that's——"

"Yes?" he said sharply.

"That's uncanny."

"Ah!" The word was a long-drawn sigh. "You think that!"

"Yes, I shouldn't care to have him about me. I shouldn't care to sleep with him in my room."

"Sleep! Heaven forbid!"

His exclamation was almost shrill. It startled me.

"Where does the dog sleep?" I asked. "Where do you put him at night?"

"There's a dressing-room opening out of my bedroom. He's shut in there."

"And you—you say you've been sleeping badly lately?"

"I haven't been sleeping at all."

"Does he whine? Does he disturb you?"

"He never makes a sound at night. I think he's afraid that if he did I should punish him. He's evidently had an unkind master, poor fellow."

There was something so hideously insincere in Vernon's voice as he said the last words that I could not help expressing the thought, the suspicion that had been, that was haunting me.

"Has he got a kind master now?" I said.

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I fixed my eyes on Vernon's.

"Has he?" I repeated.

At that moment I wanted to force things. The entrance of the dog had deepened my sense of moving in mystery until it became absolutely intolerable. A hard determination took hold upon me to compel Vernon to explain—what? I did not know. But that there was something to be explained, some strange undercurrent of motive, of desire, of intention, deep and furtive, I seemed to be aware.

"What do you mean?" Vernon said. "Surely you know my feeling for animals."

"I do."

"Then what do you mean?"

"I mean that as regards this animal, this spaniel, I don't—I can't trust you," I said. "I don't know why it is, I don't understand, I don't understand anything. But I don't trust you, Vernon. That's the truth. It's best to speak it."

To my great surprise, he did not indignant-ly resent my words, nor did he look guilty or ashamed. Indeed, it seemed to me that an expression of something like relief flitted across his face as I finished speaking.

"I knew it," he said. "I knew quite well you didn't trust me. And Gernham? Have you spoken to him of your mistrust?"

"He knows I don't understand why you bought this dog, and what you're going to do

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to him. He knows I'm—I'm afraid of—of what you may be going to do."

He was silent, and again drew his hand across the spaniel's soft black coat. The dog struggled. He struck his open hand down on the dog's head, and the dog lay still, cowering upon his master's knees.

"Gernham doesn't enter into this," he said inflexibly.

"And I?"

"You! That's different. You introduced me to Deeming."

Again the dog began to struggle upon his knees, but this time more violently.

Vernon lifted his hand again.

"Put him down!" I said. "For God's sake put him down! Don't strike him!"

"Very well."

He dropped the spaniel to the floor. The spaniel ran under the dining-table. I sprang up from my seat.

"Don't, don't!" I began.

"It's all right," said Vernon. "I've got him by the chain." He dragged the spaniel out, and fastened him up to the sideboard at the far end of the room.

"Why, you're trembling!" he said, as he came back to his chair.

"Am I?" I said, ashamed. "I'm not a coward, but—but this dog—I can't stand him near me, close to me, when I can't see what he's doing."

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I cleared my throat, went to the window, threw it open, leaned out, and spat. Leaving the window open, I came back to the table. The spaniel was now lying down on the floor, close to the sideboard.

"What is it?" I said, almost fiercely, I think, in my inexplicable physical distress, "what is it that's wrong with the dog? What is it that's unnatural about him?"

"You have no idea?" said Vernon.

"Not the slightest. The poor beast seems harmless enough, though he's terrified. One can see that."

"Exactly. He is terrified."

"And the strange thing is that his terror terrifies me."

"Now you're getting to it," Vernon said. "Why should the spaniel be terrified?"

"Why? How should I know? Isn't that for you to say?"

"Sit down again," he said. "The dog can't get to you now."

As he spoke, he sat down. I glanced towards the dog, saw that what Vernon had said was true, and followed his example.

"The dog's terror," he said. "Think of that, Luttrell! Seek for an explanation in that."

"I have, but I haven't found one."

"Whom is it terrified of?"

"Of you," I answered. "The first time we

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saw him, I noticed that he was abjectly terrified of you."

"Perfectly true. Why should that be? Is it natural?"

"Utterly unnatural," I said. "Unless he's been badly, brutally treated, and is afraid of everybody."

"He is not afraid of everybody. He is only afraid of me. Was he afraid of Lord Elyn?"

"No."

"He is only afraid of me."

"Are you certain?"

"Would you like to test it?"

"How?" I asked.

"I will leave the room for a moment—leave you alone with the dog."

"No!" I exclaimed.

"You are afraid?"

"I'm not a coward, but there's something about this spaniel which horrifies my imagination as a spectre might horrify it."

"Nevertheless, you must summon your courage. I wish it. I wish to know how the spaniel will be with you when you are alone together. Come, make the experiment."

He got up and went towards the door. I did not try to keep him.

"I'll be back in a moment," he said.

And he went softly out of the room and shut the door behind him.

When he had gone, I sat where I was, looking at the black blot on the floor by the side-

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board. A strong curiosity was awake in me fighting my strange physical repulsion. I longed to put the thing to the test, yet I feared to approach the spaniel. How long I sat there I do not know, how long I might have sat there I cannot tell had nothing occurred to bias me towards action. But something did occur. The spaniel suddenly whimpered softly, as if to attract my attention, whimpered again and struck his feathery tail upon the floor. Those natural sounds of an anxious dog reassured me. I got up quickly and went over to the sideboard. Instantly, with a sort of strangled wail, the spaniel sprang up, put his forepaws on my legs, and thrust his hot nose into my hand, pushing, pushing hard, as if he sought to hide himself in a friendly shelter. I felt a wetness on my hand, the wetness of an animal's tears. Then all my horror vanished and only pity remained. I knelt down on the carpet. I put my arms round the dog. I felt his trembling body with my hands. He was thin, hideously thin. His piteous eyes begged something of me. Still holding him with one arm, I stretched out the other, and opened a door in the sideboard. Within I saw a basket with some cut bread in it. I took out the bread. The spaniel sprang upon it passionately, tore it out of my hand, and devoured it ravenously. Then a wave of hot indignation went over me. At that moment I hated Vernon with all my soul. I hated him so much that I lost all sense of

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everything except my fury against him. I held the dog tightly as I knelt on the floor, and, turning my head towards the door, I called out—

“Vernon! Vernon!”

Instantly the door opened and Vernon appeared. The dog looked as he had looked when he was being brought into the house.

“Vernon,” I said, “you’re a d——d black-guard!”

“Why?” he said.

“This dog is starving. You’re starving him! D’you hear? You’re starving him!”

“I know I am,” he answered.

I got up. The spaniel rushed against my legs and leaned against them as I stood.

“Then Gernham was right,” I said. “You are a madman.”

“Is it madness to see what is when others are blind to it?”

“To see—to see?” I exclaimed. “What is there to see but this dog, this spaniel that you are torturing?”

“There is this spaniel—yes. Look at him. Look into his eyes. Look at the soul in them.”

There was something compelling, something almost mystical, in his voice. I looked down into the yellow eyes of the spaniel. They met mine, then looked away from mine as if unable to bear my gaze.

“What is it?” I said, in a whisper. “What is it?”

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Again I was assailed by the sensation which had come to me when I waited in the hall to know if Vernon would receive me, a sensation that, with the black spaniel, linked with it, mysteriously mingled with it, was something of the man who was dead—something of Deeming.

“Deeming!” I stammered. “Deeming!”

I did not know what I meant, but I was compelled to pronounce the name of my friend.

“Deeming?” I said once more, looking towards Vernon.

“Don’t you feel that he is here?” said Vernon.

“But he is dead.”

“Don’t you feel that he is here?”

“Yes,” I said. “But it can’t be. He is dead.”

“His body is dead—yes. But his soul, is that dead?”

When he said that, I understood what he meant, and I recoiled from the black spaniel as from a nameless horror.

“Vernon!” I said. “Vernon!”

“Do you understand now?” he asked. “Do you understand why I bought the spaniel, why I have kept the spaniel here in the house where he tortured his dog? It was to punish him as he punished it, to torture him as he tortured it. Directly I saw the spaniel crouching down in the Park, directly I looked into his eyes, I

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knew. Deeming died on the 30th of June, the spaniel was born on that very day. The soul of the dog-torturer passed at the death of the body of the man into the body of the dog. I am not mad—no. I am only just. I am the instrument of the justice of Providence. Deeming's soul has been sent back into the world to pay its penalty. And I am here to see that the penalty is paid."

There was blazing in his eyes the light which I had seen in them for the first time in the restaurant in Rome, the light which had made Deeming say that in Vernon there was the spirit of a black fanatic.

"It's not true!" I said. "It can't be true!"

"But Lord Elyn has felt it, Cragg has felt it, you have felt it—the strangeness of the spaniel. You know now, you know that what I say is true. Deny that you know it is true! Deny it then!"

I opened my lips to deny it, but they refused to speak. I was filled with a horror of the imagination, but I was resolved not to succumb to it. I seized the steel chain that was attached to the collar of the spaniel, and untied it from the sideboard.

"What are you doing?" said Vernon sharply.

"Good-night, Vernon," I said, trying to keep my voice calm; "I am going to take the spaniel with me."

As I spoke I moved towards the door. The

"I WENT OUT INTO THE NIGHT CARRYING IT IN MY ARMS."



"I WENT OUT INTO THE NIGHT CARRYING IT IN MY ARMS."



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spaniel slunk along beside me, with its belly close to the floor, trying to press itself against my legs.

“What!” said Vernon, “to happiness—to affection!”

I was close to the door. I had my fingers upon the handle.

“That!” he cried with violence. “No! Rather than that, let it end now and here!”

He made a rapid movement; the spaniel howled and cowered against the door. I heard the crack of a pistol-shot. I felt the chain leap in my hand as the spaniel sprang upwards and fell on the floor.

I bent down, touched him, turned him over. He was dead.

Then I faced Vernon.

“Murderer!” I said. “Murderer!”

“But—he was only a black spaniel!” Vernon said, laying the revolver down on the table.

“Murderer!” I repeated.

Then I lifted up the corpse of the spaniel, and went out into the night carrying it in my arms.

THE MISSION OF MR. EUSTACE GREYNE

I

MRS. EUSTACE GREYNE (pronounced Green) wrinkled her forehead—that noble, that startling forehead which had been written about in the newspapers of two hemispheres—laid down her American Squeezer pen, and sighed. It was an autumn day, nipping and melancholy, full of the rustle of dying leaves and the faint sound of muffin bells, and Belgrave Square looked sad even to the great female novelist who had written her way into a mansion there. Fog hung about with the policeman on the pavement. The passing motor cars were like shadows. Their stertorous pantings sounded to Mrs. Greyne's ears like the asthma of dying monsters. She sighed again, and murmured in a deep contralto voice: "It must be so." Then she got up, crossed the heavy Persian carpet which had been bought with the proceeds of a short story in her earlier days, and placed her forefinger upon an electric bell.

Like lightning a powdered giant came.

"Has Mr. Greyne gone out?"

"No, ma'am."

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“Where is he?”

“In his study, ma’am, pasting the last of the cuttings into the new album.”

Mrs. Greyne smiled. It was a pretty picture the unconscious six-footer had conjured up.

“I am sorry to disturb Mr. Greyne,” she answered, with that gracious, and even curling suavity which won all hearts; “but I wish to see him. Will you ask him to come to me for a moment?”

The giant flew, silk-stockinged, to obey the mandate, while Mrs. Greyne sat down on a carved oaken chair of ecclesiastical aspect to await her husband.

She was a famous woman, a personage, this simply-attired lady. With an American Squeezer pen she had won fame, fortune, and a mansion in Belgrave Square, and all without the sacrifice of principle. Respectability incarnate, she had so dealt with the sorrows and evils of the world that she had rendered them utterly acceptable to Mrs. Grundy, Mr. Grundy, and all the Misses Grundy. People said she dived into the depths of human nature, and brought up nothing that need scandalise a curate’s grandmother, or the whole-aunt of an archdeacon; and this was so true that she had made a really prodigious amount of money. Her large, her solid, her unrelenting books lay upon every table. Even the smart set kept them, uncut—like pretty sinners who have

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never been "found out"—to give an air of hap-hazard intellectuality to frisky boudoirs. All the clergy, however unable to get their tithes, bought them. All bishops alluded to them in "pulpit utterances." Fabulous prices were paid for them by magazine editors. They ran as serials through all the tale of months. The suburbs battered on them. The provinces adored them. Country people talked of no other literature. In fact, Mrs. Eustace Greyne was a really fabulous success.

Why, then, should she heave these heavy sighs in Belgrave Square? Why should she lift an intellectual hand as though to tousle the glossy chestnut bandeaux which swept back from her forcible forehead, and screw her reassuring features into these wrinkles of perplexity and distress?

The door opened, and Mr. Eustace Greyne appeared, "What is it, Eugenia?" upon his lips.

Mr. Greyne was a number of years younger than his celebrated wife, and looked even younger than his years. He was a very smart man, with smooth, jet-black hair, which he wore parted in the middle; pleasant, dark eyes that could twinkle gently; a clear, pale complexion; and a nice, tall figure. One felt, in glancing at him, that he had been an Eton boy, and had at least thought of going into the militia at some period of his life. His history can be briefly told.

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Scarcely had he emerged into the world before he met and was married to Mrs. Eustace Greyne, then Miss Eugenia Hannibal-Barker. He had had no time to sow a single oat, wild or otherwise; no time to adore a barmaid, or wish to have his name linked with that of an actress; no time to do anything wrong, or even to know, with the complete accuracy desired by all persevering young men, what was really wrong. Miss Eugenia Hannibal-Barker sailed upon his horizon, and he struck his flag to matrimony. Ever since then he had been her husband, and had never, even for one second, emerged beyond the boundaries of the most intellectual respectability. He was the most innocent of men, although he knew all the important editors in London. Swaddled in money by his successful wife, he considered her a goddess. She poured the thousands into Coutts' Bank, and with the arrival of each fresh thousand he was more firmly convinced that she was a goddess. To say he looked up to her would be too mild. As the Cockney tourist in Chamounix peers at the summit of Mont Blanc, he peered at Mrs. Greyne. And when, finally, she bought the lease of the mansion in Belgrave Square, he knew her Delphic.

So now he appeared in the oracle's retreat respectfully, "What is it, Eugenia?" upon his admiring lips.

"Sit down, my husband," she murmured.

Mr. Greyne subsided by the fire, placing

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his pointed patent-leather toes upon the burnished fender. Without the fog grew deeper, and the chorus of the muffin bells more plaintive. The fire-light, flickering over Mrs. Greyne's majestic features, made them look Rembrandtesque. Her large, oxlike eyes were fixed and thoughtful. After a pause, she said:

"Eustace, I shall have to send you upon a mission."

"A mission, Eugenia!" said Mr. Greyne in great surprise.

"A mission of the utmost importance, the utmost delicacy."

"Has it anything to do with Romeike & Curtice?"

"No."

"Will it take me far?"

"That is my trouble. It will take you very far."

"Out of London?"

"Oh, yes."

"Out of—not out of England?"

"Yes; it will take you to Algeria."

"Good gracious!" cried Mr. Greyne.

Mrs. Greyne sighed.

"Good gracious!" Mr. Greyne repeated after a short interval. "Am I to go alone?"

"Of course you must take Darrell." Darrell was Mr. Greyne's valet.

"And what am I to do at Algiers?"

"You must obtain for me there the whole

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of the material for book six of 'Catherine's Repentance.' " "Catherine's Repentance" was the gigantic novel upon which Mrs. Greyne was at that moment engaged.

"I will not disguise from you, Eustace," continued Mrs. Greyne, looking increasingly Rembrandtesque, "that, in my present work, I am taking a somewhat new departure."

"Well, but we are very comfortable here," said Mr. Greyne.

With each new book they had changed their abode. "Harriet" took them from Phillimore Gardens to Queensgate Terrace; "Jane's Desire" moved them on to a corner house in Sloane Street; with "Isobel's Fortune" they passed to Curzon Street; "Susan's Vanity" landed them in Coburg Place; and, finally, "Margaret's Involution" had planted them in Belgrave Square. Now, with each of these works of genius Mrs. Greyne had taken what she called "a new departure." Mr. Greyne's remark is, therefore, explicable.

"True. Still, there is always Park Lane."

She mused for a moment. Then, leaning more heavily upon the carved lions of her chair, she continued:

"Hitherto, although I have sometimes dealt with human frailty, I have treated it gently. I have never betrayed a Zola-spirit."

"Zola! My darling!" cried Mr. Eustace Greyne. "You are surely not going to betray anything of that sort now!"

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"If she does we shall soon have to move off to West Kensington," was his secret thought.

"No. But in book six of 'Catherine' I have to deal with sin, with tumult, with African frailty. It is inevitable."

She sighed once more. The burden of the new book was very heavy upon her.

"African frailty!" murmured the astonished Eustace Greyne.

"Now, neither you nor I, my husband, know anything about this."

"Certainly not, my darling. How should we? We have never explored beyond Lucerne."

"We must, therefore, get to know about it—at least you must. For I cannot leave London. The continuity of the brain's traveling must not be imperiled by any violent bodily activity. In the present stage of my book a sea journey might be disastrous."

"Certainly you should keep quiet, my love. But then——"

"You must go for me to Algiers. There you must get me what I want. I fear you will have to poke about in the native quarters a good deal for it, so you had better buy two revolvers, one for yourself and one for Darrell."

Mr. Greyne gasped. The calmness of his wife amazed him. He was not intellectual enough to comprehend fully the deep imag-

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inings of a mighty brain, the obsession work is in the worker.

“African frailty is what I want,” pursued Mrs. Greyne. “One hundred closely-printed pages of African frailty. You will collect for me the raw material, and I shall so manipulate it that it will fall discreetly, even elevatingly, into the artistic whole. Do you understand me, Eustace?”

“I am to travel to Algiers, and see all the wickedness to be seen there, take notes of it, and bring them back to you.”

“Precisely.”

“And how long am I to stay?”

“Until you have made yourself acquainted with the depths.”

“A fortnight?”

“I should think that would be enough. Take Brush’s remedy for seasickness and plenty of antipyrin, your fur coat for the crossing, and a white helmet and umbrella for the arrival. You have lead pencils?”

“Plenty.”

“A couple of Merrin’s exercise-books should be enough to contain your notes.”

“When am I to go?”

“The sooner the better. I am at a standstill for want of the material. You might catch the express to Paris to-morrow; no, say the day after to-morrow.” She looked at him tenderly. “The parting will be bitter.”

“Very bitter,” Mr. Eustace Greyne replied.

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He felt really upset. Mrs. Greyne laid the hand which had brought them from Phillimore Gardens to Belgrave Square gently upon his.

"Think of the result," she said. "The greatest book I have done yet. A book that will last. A book that will——"

"Take us to Park Lane," he murmured.

The Rembrandtesque head nodded. The noble features, as of a strictly respectable Roman emperor, relaxed.

"A book that will take us to Park Lane."

At this moment the door opened, and the footman inquired:

"Could Mademoiselle Verbèna see you for a minute, ma'am?"

Mademoiselle Verbèna was the French governess of the two little Greynes. The great novelist had consented to become a mother.

"Certainly."

In another moment Mademoiselle Verbèna was added to the group beside the fire.

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II

WE have said that Mademoiselle Verbèna was the French governess of little Adolphus and Olivia Greyne, and so she was to this extent—that she taught them French, and that Mr. and Mrs. Greyne supposed her to be a Parisian. But life has its little ironies. Mademoiselle Verbèna in the house of this great and respectable novelist was one of them; for she was a Levantine, born at Port Said of a Suez Canal father and a Suez Canal mother. Now, nobody can desire to say anything against Port Said. At the same time, few mothers would inevitably pick it out as the ideal spot from which a beneficent influence for childhood's happy hour would be certain to emanate. Nor, it must be allowed, is a Suez Canal ancestry specially necessary to a trainer of young souls. It may not be a drawback, but it can hardly be described as an advantage. This, Mademoiselle Verbèna was intelligent enough to know. She, therefore, concealed the fact that her father had been a dredger of Monsieur de Lesseps' triumph, her mother a bar-lady of the historic coal wharf where the ships are fed, and preferred to suppose—and to permit others to suppose—that she had first

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seen the light in the Rue St. Honoré, her parents being a count and countess of some old régime.

This supposition, retained from her earliest years, had affected her appearance and her manner. She was a very neat, very trim, even a very attractive little person, with dark brown, roguish eyes, blue-black hair, a fairy-like figure, and the prettiest hands and feet imaginable. She had first attracted Mrs. Greyne's attention by her devotion to St. Paul's Cathedral, and this devotion she still kept up. Whenever she had an hour or two free she always—so she herself said—spent it in "*ce charmant* St. Paul."

As she entered the oracle's retreat she cast down her eyes, and trembled visibly.

"What is it, Miss Verbèna?" inquired Mrs. Greyne, with a kindly English accent, calculated to set any poor French creature quite at ease.

Mademoiselle Verbèna trembled more.

"I have received bad news, madame."

"I grieve to hear it. Of what nature?"

"Mamma has *une bronchite très grave*."

"A what, Miss Verbèna?"

"Pardon, madame. A very grave bronchitis. She cries for me."

"Indeed!"

"The doctors say she will die."

"This is very sad."

The Levantine wept. Even Suez Canal folk

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are not proof against all human sympathy. Mr. Greyne blew his nose beside the fire, and Mrs. Greyne said again:

“I repeat that this is very sad.”

“Madame, if I do not go to mamma tomorrow I shall not see her more.”

Mrs. Greyne looked very grave.

“Oh!” she remarked. She thought profoundly for a moment, and then added: “Indeed!”

“It is true, madame.”

Suddenly Mademoiselle Verbèna flung herself down on the Persian carpet at Mrs. Greyne’s large but well-proportioned feet, and, bathing them with her tears, cried in a heartrending manner:

“Madame will let me go! madame will permit me to fly to poor mamma—to close her dying eyes—to kiss once again——”

Mr. Greyne was visibly affected, and even Mrs. Greyne seemed somewhat put about, for she moved her feet rather hastily out of reach of the dependant’s emotion, and made her scramble up.

“Where is your poor mother?”

“In Paris, madame. In the Rue St. Honoré, where I was born. Oh, if she should die there! If she should——”

Mrs. Greyne raised her hand, commanding silence.

“You wish to go there?”

“If madame permits.”

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“When?”

“To-morrow, madame.”

“To-morrow? This is decidedly abrupt.”

“*Mais la bronchite, madame*, she is abrupt, and death, she may be abrupt.”

“True. One moment!”

There was an instant's silence for Mrs. Greyne to let loose her brain in. She did so, then said:

“You have my permission. Go to-morrow, but return as soon as possible. I do not wish Adolphus to lose his still uncertain grasp upon the irregular verbs.”

In a flood of grateful tears Mademoiselle Verbèna retired to make her preparations. On the morrow she was gone.

The morrow was a day of much perplexity, much bustle and excitement for Mr. Greyne and the valet, Darrell. They were preparing for Algiers. In the morning, at an early hour, Mr. Greyne set forth in the barouche with Mrs. Greyne to purchase African necessities: a small but well-supplied medicine chest, a pith helmet, a white-and-green umbrella, a Bae-deker, a couple of Smith & Wesson Springfield revolvers with a due amount of cartridges, a dozen of Merrin's exercise-books—on mature reflection Mrs. Greyne thought that two would hardly contain a sufficient amount of African frailty for her present purpose—a packet of lead pencils, some bottles of a remedy for seasickness, a silver flask for cognac, and various

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other trifles such as travellers in distant continents require.

Meanwhile Darrell was learning French for the journey, and packing his own and his master's trunks. The worthy fellow, a man of twenty-five summers, had never been across the Channel—the Greynes being by no means prone to foreign travel—and it may, therefore, be imagined that he was in a state of considerable expectation as he laid the trousers, coats, and waistcoats in their respective places, selected such boots as seemed likely to wear well in a tropical climate, and dropped those shirts which are so contrived as to admit plenty of ventilation to the heated body into the case reserved for them.

When Mr. Greyne returned from his shopping excursion the barouche, loaded almost to the gunwale—if one may be permitted a nautical expression in this connection—had to be disburdened, and its contents conveyed upstairs to Mr. Greyne's bedroom, into which Mrs. Greyne herself presently entered to give directions for their disposing. Nor was it till the hour of sunset that everything was in due order, the straps set fast, the keys duly turned in the locks—the labels—"Mr. Eustace Greyne: Passenger to Algiers: *via* Marseilles"—carefully written out in a full, round hand. Rook's tickets had been bought; so now everything was ready, and the last evening in England might be spent by Mr. Greyne in the

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drawing-room and by Darrell in the servants' hall quietly, socially, perhaps pathetically.

The pathos of the situation, it must be confessed, appealed more to the master than to the servant. Darrell was very gay, and inclined to be boastful, full of information as to how he would comport himself with "them there Frenchies," and how he would make "them pore, godless Arabs sit up." But Mr. Greyne's attitude of mind was very different. As the night drew on, and Mrs. Greyne and he sat by the wood fire in the magnificent drawing-room, to which they always adjourned after dinner, a keen sense of the sorrow of departure swept over them both.

"How lonely you will feel without me, Eugenia," said Mr. Greyne. "I have been thinking of that all day."

"And you, Eustace, how desolate will be your tale of days! My mind runs much on that. You will miss me at every hour."

"You are so accustomed to have me within call, to depend upon me for encouragement in your life-work. I scarcely know how you will get on when I am far across the sea."

"And you, for whom I have labored, for whom I have planned and calculated, what will be your sensations when you realize that a gulf—the Gulf of Lyons—is fixed irrevocably between us?"

So their thoughts ran. Each one was full of tender pity for the other. Towards bed-

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time, however, conscious that the time for colloquy was running short, they fell into more practical discourse.

"I wonder," said Mr. Greyne, "whether I shall find any difficulty in gaining the information you require, my darling. I suppose these places"—he spoke vaguely, for his thoughts were vague—"are somewhat awkward to come at. Naturally, they would avoid the eye of day."

Mrs. Greyne looked profound.

"Yes. Evil ever seeks the darkness. You will have to do the same."

"You think my investigations must take place at night?"

"I should certainly suppose so."

"And where shall I find a cicerone?"

"Apply to Rook."

"In what terms? You see, dearest, this is rather a special matter, isn't it?"

"Very special. But on no account hint that you are in Algiers for 'Catherine's' sake. It would get into the papers. It would be cabled to America. The whole reading world would be agog, and the future interest of the book discounted."

Mr. Greyne looked at his wife with reverence. In such moments he realized, almost too poignantly, her great position.

"I will be careful," he said. "What would you recommend me to say?"

"Well"—Mrs. Greyne knit her superb

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forehead—"I should suggest that you present yourself as an ordinary traveler, but with a specially inquiring bent of mind and a slight tendency towards the—the—er—hidden things of life."

"I suppose you wish me to visit the public houses?"

"I wish you to see everything that has part or lot in African frailty. Go everywhere, see everything. Bring your notes to me, and I will select such fragments of the broken commandments as suit my purpose, which is, as always, the edifying of the human race. Only this time I mean to purge it as by fire."

"That corner house in Park Lane, next to the Duke of Ebury's, would suit us very well," said Mr. Greyne reflectively.

"We could sell our lease here at an advance," his wife rejoined. "You will not waste your journey, Eustace?"

"My love," returned Mr. Greyne with decision, "I will apply to Rook on arrival, and, if I find his man unsatisfactory, if I have any reason to suspect that I am not being shown everything—more especially in the Kasbah region, which, from the guide-books we bought to-day, is, I take it, the most abandoned portion of the city—I will seek another cicerone."

"Do so. And now to bed. You must sleep well to-night in preparation for the journey."

It was their invariable habit before retiring

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to drink each a tumbler of barley water, which was set out by the butler in Mrs. Greyne's study. After this nightcap Mrs. Greyne wrote up her anticipatory diary, while Mr. Greyne smoked a mild cigar, and then they went to bed. To-night, as usual, they repaired to the sanctum, and drank their barley water. Having done so, Mr. Greyne drew forth his cigar-case, while Mrs. Greyne went to her writing-table, and prepared to unlock the drawer in which her diary reposed, safe from all prying eyes.

The match was struck, the key was inserted in the lock, and turned. As the cigar end glowed the drawer was opened. Mr. Greyne heard a contralto cry. He turned from the arm-chair in which he was just about to seat himself.

“My love, is anything the matter?”

His wife was bending forward with both hands in the drawer, telling over its contents.

“My diary is not here!”

“Your diary!”

“It is gone.”

“But”—he came over to her—“this is very serious. I presume, like all diaries, it is full of——” Instinctively he had been about to say “damning”; he remembered his dear one's irreproachable character and substituted “precious secrets.”

“It is full of matter which must never be

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given to the world—my secret thoughts, my aspirations. The whole history of my soul is there.”

“Heavens! It must be found.”

They searched the writing-table. They searched the room. No diary.

“Could you have taken it to my room, and left it there?” asked Mr. Greyne.

They hastened thither, and looked—in vain. By this time the servants were gone to bed, and the two searchers were quite alone on the ground floor of their magnificent mansion. Mrs. Greyne began to look seriously perturbed. Her Roman features worked.

“This is appalling,” she exclaimed. “Some thief, knowing it priceless, must have stolen the diary. It will be published in America. It will bring in thousands—but to others, not to us.”

She began to wring her hands. It was near midnight.

“Think, my love, think!” cried Mr. Greyne. “Where could you have taken it? You had it last night?”

“Certainly. I remember writing in it that you would be sailing to Algiers on the *Général Bertrand* on Thursday of this week, and that on the night I should be feeling widowed here. The previous night I wrote that yesterday I should have to tell you of your mission. You know I always put down beforehand what I shall do, what I shall even think on each suc-

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ceeding day. It is a practice that regulates the mind and conduct, that helps to uniformity."

"How true! Who can have taken it? Do you ever leave it about?"

"Never. Am I a madwoman?"

"My darling, compose yourself! We must search the house."

They proceeded to do so, and, on coming into the schoolroom, Mrs. Greyne, who was in front, uttered a sudden cry.

Upon the table of Mademoiselle Verbèna lay the diary, open at the following entry:—

On Thursday next poor Eustace will be on board the *Général Bertrand*, sailing for Algiers. I shall be here thinking of myself, and of him in relation to myself. God help us both. Duty is sometimes stern. *Mem.* The corner house in Park Lane, next the Duke of Ebury's, has sixty years still to run; the lease, that is. Thursday—poor Eustace!

"What does this portend?" cried Mrs. Greyne.

"My darling, it passes my wit to imagine," replied her husband.

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III

THE parting of Mr. and Mrs. Greyne on the following morning was very affecting. It took place at Victoria Station, in the midst of a small crowd of admiring strangers, who had recognised the commanding presence of the great novelist, and had gathered round to observe her manifestations.

Mrs. Greyne was considerably shaken by the event of the previous night. Although, on the discovery of the diary, the house had been roused, and all the servants closely questioned, no light had been thrown upon its migration from the locked drawer to the schoolroom table. Adolphus and Olivia, jerked from sleep by the hasty hands of a maid, could only weep and wan. The powdered footmen, one and all, declared they had never heard of a diary. The butler gave warning on the spot, keeping on his nightcap to give greater effect to his pronunciamiento. It was all most unsatisfactory, and for one wild moment Mrs. Greyne seriously thought of retaining her husband by her as a protection against the mysterious thief who had been at work in their midst. Could it be Mademoiselle Verbèna? The dread surmise occurred, but Mr. Greyne rejected it.

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“Her father was a count,” he said. “Besides, my darling, I don’t believe she can read English; certainly not unless it is printed.”

So there the matter rested, and the moment of parting came.

There was a murmur of respectful sympathy as Mrs. Greyne clasped her husband tenderly in her arms, and pressed his head against her prune-coloured bonnet strings. The whistle sounded. The train moved on. Leaning from a reserved first-class compartment, Mr. Greyne waved a silk pocket-handkerchief so long as his wife’s Roman profile stood out clear against the fog and smoke of London. But at last it faded, grew remote, took on the appearance of a feebly-executed crayon drawing, vanished. He sank back upon the cushions—alone. Darrell was travelling second with the dressing-case.

It was a strange sensation, to be alone, and *en route* to Algiers. Mr. Greyne scarcely knew what to make of it. A schoolboy suddenly despatched to Timbuctoo could hardly have felt more terribly emancipated than he did. He was so absolutely unaccustomed to freedom, he had been for so long without the faintest desire for it, that to have it thrust upon him so suddenly was almost alarming. He felt lonely, anxious, horribly unmarried. To divert his thoughts he drew forth a Merrin’s exercise-book and a pencil, and wrote on the first page, in large letters, “*African Frailty*,

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Notes for." Then he sat gazing at the title of his first literary work, and wondering what on earth he was going to see in Algiers.

Vague visions of himself in the bars of African public-houses, in mosques, in the two-pair-backs of dervishes, in bazaars—which he pictured to himself like those opened by royalties at the Queen's Hall—in Moorish interiors surrounded by voluptuous ladies with large oval eyes, black tresses, and Turkish trousers of spangled muslin, flitted before his mental gaze. When the train ran upon Dover Pier, and the white horses of the turbulent Channel foamed at his feet, he started as one roused from a Rip Van Winkle sleep. Severe illness occupied his whole attention for a time, and then recovery.

In Paris he dined at the buffet like one in a dream, and, at the appointed hour, came forth to take the *rapide* for Marseilles. He looked for Darrell and the dressing-case. They were not to be seen. There stood the train. Passengers were mounting into it. Old ladies with agitated faces were buying pillows and nibbling biscuits. Elderly gentlemen with yellow countenances and red ribands in their coats were purchasing the *Figaro* and the *Gil Blas*. Children with bare legs were being hauled into compartments. Rook's agent was explaining to a muddled tourist in a tam-o'-shanter the exact difference between the words "*Oui*" and "*Non*." The bustle of departure was in the

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air, but Darrell was not to be seen. Mr. Greyne had left him upon the platform with minute directions as to the point from which the train would start and the hour of its going. Yet he had vanished. The most frantic search, the most frenzied inquiries of officials and total strangers, failed to elicit his whereabouts, and, finally, Mr. Greyne was flung forcibly upward into the *wagonlit*, and caught by the *contrôleur* when the train was actually moving out of the station.

A moment later he fell exhausted upon the pink-plush seat of his compartment, realising his terrible position. He was now utterly alone; without servant, hair-brushes, tooth-brushes, razors, sponges, pajamas, shoes. It was a solitude that might be felt. He thought of the sea journey with no kindly hand to minister to him, the arrival in Africa with no humble companion at his side, to wonder with him at the black inhabitants and help him through the customs—to say nothing of the manners. He thought of the dread homes of iniquity into which he must penetrate by night in search of the material for the voracious “Catherine.” He had meant to take Darrell with him to them all—Darrell, whose joyful delight in the prospect of exploring the Eastern fastnesses of crime had been so boyish, so truly English in its frank, its even boisterous sincerity.

And now he was utterly alone, almost like Robinson Crusoe.

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The *contrôleur* came in to make the bed. Mr. Greyne told him the dreadful story.

"No doubt he has been lured away, monsieur. The dressing-case was of value?"

"Crocodile, gold fittings."

"Probably monsieur will never see him again. As likely as not he will sleep in the Seine to-night, and at the morgue to-morrow."

Mr. Greyne shuddered. This was an ill omen for his expedition. He drank a stiff whisky-and-soda instead of the usual barley water, and went to bed to dream of bloody murders in which he was the victim.

When the train ran into Marseilles next morning he was an unshaven, miserable man.

"Have I time to buy a tooth-brush," he inquired anxiously at the station, "before the boat sails for Algiers?"

The *chef de gare* thought so. Monsieur had four hours, if that was sufficient. Mr. Greyne hastened forth, had a Turkish bath, purchased a new dressing-case, ate a hasty *déjeuner*, and took a cab to the wharf. It was a long drive over the stony streets. He glanced from side to side, watching the bustling traffic, the hurry of the nations going to and from the ships. His eyes rested upon two Arabs who were striding along in his direction. Doubtless they were also bound for Algiers. He thought they looked most wicked, and hastily took a note of them for "African Frailty." Beside his sense of loss and loneliness marched the sense

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of duty. The great woman at home in Belgrave Square, founder of his fortunes, mother of his children, she depended upon him. Even in his own hour of need he would not fail her. He took a lead pencil, and wrote down:

Saw two Arab ruffians. Bare legs. Look capable of anything. Should not be surprised to hear that they had——

There he paused. That they had what? Done things. Of course, but what things? That was the question. He exerted his imagination, but failed to arrive at any conclusion as to their probable crimes. His knowledge of wickedness was really absurdly limited. For the first time he felt slightly ashamed of it, and began to wish he had gone into the militia. He comforted himself with the thought that in a fortnight he would probably be fit for the regular army. This thought cheered him slightly, and it was with a slight smile upon his face that he welcomed the first glimpse of the *Général Bertrand*, which was lying against the quay ready to cast off at the stroke of noon. Most of the passengers were aboard, but, as Mr. Greyne stepped out of his cab, and prepared to pay the Maltese driver, a trim little lady, plainly dressed in black, and carrying a tiny and rather coquettish hand-bag, was tripping lightly across the gangway. Mr. Greyne glanced at her as he turned to follow, glanced, and then started. That back was

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surely familiar to him. Where could he have seen it before? He searched his memory as the little lady vanished. It was a smart, even a *chic* back, a back that knew how to take care of itself, a back that need not go through the world alone, a back, in fine, that was most distinctly attractive, if not absolutely alluring. Where had he seen it before, or had he ever seen it at all? He thought of his wife's back, flat, powerful, uncompromising. This was very different, more—how should he put it to himself?—more Algerian, perhaps. He could vaguely conceive it a back such as one might meet with while engaged in adding to one's stock of knowledge of—well—African frailty.

At this moment the steward appeared to show him to his cabin, and his further reflections were mainly connected with the Gulf of Lyons.

Twilight was beginning to fall when, so far as he was capable of thinking, he thought he would like a breath of air. For some moments he lay quite still, dwelling on this idea which had so mysteriously come to him. Then he got up, and thought again, seated upon the cabin floor. He knew there was a deck. He remembered having seen one when he came aboard. He put on his fur coat, still sitting on the cabin floor. The process took some time—he fancied about a couple of years. At last, however, it was completed, and he rose to his feet with the assistance of the washstand and the berth.

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The ship seemed very busy, full of almost American activity. He thought a greater calm would have been more decent, and waited in the hope that the floor would presently cease to forget itself. As it showed no symptoms of complying with his desire he endeavoured to spurn it, and, in the fulness of time, gained the companion.

It was very strange, as he remembered afterwards, that only when he had gained the companion did the sense of his utter loneliness rush upon him with overwhelming force: one of the ironies of life, he supposed. Eventually he shook the companion off with a good deal of difficulty, and found himself installed upon planks under a grey sky, and holding fast to a railing, which was all that interposed between him and eternity.

At first he was only conscious of greyness and the noise of winds and waters, but presently a black daub seemed to hover for a second somewhere on the verge of his world, to hover and disappear. He wondered what it was. A smut, perhaps. He rubbed his face. The daub returned. It was very large for a smut. He strove to locate it, and found that it must be somewhere on his left cheek. With a great effort he took out his pocket-handkerchief. Suddenly the daub assumed monstrous proportions. He turned his head, and perceived the lady in black whom he had seen tripping over the gangway on his arrival.

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She was a few steps from him, leaning upon the rail in an attitude of the deepest dejection, with her face averted; yet it struck him that her right shoulder was oddly familiar, as her back had surely been. The turn of her head, too—he coughed despairingly. The lady took no notice. He coughed again. Interest was quickening in him. He was determined to see the lady's face.

This time she looked around, showing a pale countenance bedewed with tears, and totally devoid of any expression which he could connect with a consciousness of his presence. For a moment she stared vacantly at him, while he, with almost equal vacancy, regarded her. Then a thrill of surprise shook him. A sudden light of knowledge leaped up in him, and he exclaimed:

“Mademoiselle Verbèna!”

“Monsieur?” murmured the lady, with an accent of surprise.

“Mademoiselle Verbèna! Surely it is—it must be!”

He had staggered sideways, nearing her.

“Mademoiselle Verbèna, do you not know me? It is I, Eustace Greyne, the father of your pupils, the husband of Mrs. Eustace Greyne?”

An expression of stark amazement came into the lady's face at these words. She leaned forward till her eyes were close to Mr. Greyne's then gave a little cry.

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“*Mon Dieu!* It is true! You are so altered that I could not recognise. And then—what are you doing here, on the wide sea, far from madame?”

“I was just about to ask you the very same question!” cried Mr. Greyne.

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IV.

"ALAS, monsieur!" said Mademoiselle Verbena in her silvery voice, "I go to see my poor mother."

"But I understood that she was dying in Paris."

"Even so. But, when I reached the Rue St. Honoré, I found that they had removed to Algiers. It was the only chance, the doctor said—a warm climate, the sun of Africa. There was no time to let me know. They took her away at once. And now I follow—perhaps to find her dead."

Large tears rolled down her cheeks. Mr. Greyne was deeply affected.

"Let us hope for the best," he exclaimed, seized by a happy inspiration.

The Levantine strove to smile.

"But you, monsieur, why are you here? Ah! perhaps madame is with you! Let me go to her! Let me kiss her dear hands once more —"

Mr. Greyne mournfully checked her fond excitement.

"I am quite alone," he said.

A tragic expression came into the Levantine's face.

"But, then——" she began.

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It was impossible for him to tell her about "Catherine." He was, therefore, constrained to subterfuge.

"I—I was suddenly overtaken by—by influenza," he said, in some confusion. "The doctor recommended change of air, of scene. He suggested Algiers——"

"*Mon Dieu!* It is like poor mamma!"

"Precisely. Our constitutions are—are doubtless similar. I shall take this opportunity also of improving my knowledge of African manners and—and customs."

A strange smile seemed to dawn for a second on Mademoiselle Verbèna's face, but it died instantaneously in a grimace of pain.

"My teeth make me bad," she said. "Ah, monsieur, I must go below, to pray for poor mamma——" she paused, then softly added, "and for monsieur."

She made a movement as if to depart, but Mr. Greyne begged her to remain. In his loneliness the sight even of a Levantine whom he knew solaced his yearning heart. He felt quite friendly towards this poor, unhappy girl, for whom, perhaps, such a shock was preparing upon the distant shore.

"Better stay!" he said. "The air will do you good."

"Ah, if I die, what matter? Unless mamma lives there is no one in the world who cares for me, for whom I care."

"There—there is Mrs. Greyne," said her

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husband. "And then St. Paul's—remember St. Paul's."

"Ah *ce charmant* St. Paul's! Shall I ever see him more?"

She looked at Mr. Greyne, and suddenly—he knew not why—Mr. Greyne remembered the incident of the diary, and blushed.

"Monsieur has fever!"

Mr. Greyne shook his head. The Levantine eyed him curiously.

"Monsieur wishes to say something to me, and does not like to speak."

Mr. Greyne made an effort. Now that he was with this gentle lady, with her white face, her weeping eyes, her plain black dress, the mere suspicion that she could have opened a locked drawer with a secret key, and filched therefrom a private record, seemed to him unpardonable. Yet, for a brief instant, it had occurred to him, and Mrs. Greyne had seriously held it. He looked at Mademoiselle Verbena, and a sudden impulse to tell her the truth overcame him.

"Yes," he said.

"Tell me, monsieur."

In broken words—the ship was still very busy—Mr. Greyne related the incident of the loss and finding of the diary. As he spoke a slight change stole over the Levantine's face. It certainly became less pale.

"But you have fever now!" cried Mr. Greyne anxiously.

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“I! No; I flush with horror, not with fever! The diary, the sacred diary of madame, exposed to view, read by the children, perhaps the servants! That footman, Thomas, with the nose of curiosity! Ah! I behold that nose penetrating into the holy secrets of the existence of madame! I behold it—ah!”

She burst into a fit of hysterics, the laughing species, which is so much more terrible than the other sort. Mr. Greyne was greatly concerned. He lurched to her, and implored her to be calm; but she only laughed the more, while tears streamed down her cheeks. The vision of Thomas gloating over Mrs. Greyne's diary seemed utterly to unnerve her, and Mr. Greyne was able to measure, by this ebullition of horror, the depth of the respect and affection entertained by her for his beloved wife. When, at length, she grew calmer he escorted her towards her cabin, offering her his arm, on which she leaned heavily. As soon as they were in the narrow and heaving passage she turned to him, and said:

“Who can have taken the diary?”

Mr. Greyne blushed again.

“We think it was Thomas,” he said.

Mademoiselle Verbèna looked at him steadily for a moment, then she cried:

“God bless you, monsieur!”

Mr. Greyne was startled by the abruptness of this pious ejaculation.

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“Why?” he inquired.

“You are a good man. You, at least, would not condescend to insult a friendless woman by unworthy suspicions. And madame?”

“Mrs. Greyne”—stammered Mr. Greyne—“is convinced that it was Thomas. In fact—in fact, she was the first to say so.”

Mademoiselle Verbèna tenderly pressed his hand.

“Madame is an angel. God bless you both!”

She tottered into her cabin, and, as she shut the door, Mr. Greyne heard the terrible, laughing hysterics beginning again.

The next day an influence from Africa seemed spread upon the sea. Calm were the waters, calm and blue. No cloud appeared in the sky. The fierce activities of the ship had ceased, and Mademoiselle Verbèna tripped upon the deck at an early hour, to find Mr. Greyne already installed there, and looking positively cheerful. He started up as he perceived her, and chivalrously escorted her to a chair.

Everyone who has made a voyage knows that the sea breeds intimacies. By the time the white houses of Algiers rose on their hill out of the bosom of the waves Mademoiselle Verbèna and Mr. Greyne were—shall we say like sister and brother? She had told him all about her childhood in dear Paris, the death of her father the count, murmuring the name

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of Louis XVI., the poverty of her mother the countess, her own resolve to put aside all aristocratic prejudices and earn her own living. He, in return, had related his Eton days, his momentary bias towards the militia, his marriage—as an innocent youth—with Miss Eugenia Hannibal-Barker. Coming to later times, he was led to confide to the tender-hearted Levantine the fact that he hoped to increase his stock of knowledge while in Africa. Without alluding to “Catherine,” he hinted that the cure of influenza was not his only reason for foreign travel.

“I wish to learn something of men and—and women,” he murmured in the shell-like ear presented to him. “Of their passions, their desires, their—their follies.”

“Ah!” cried Mademoiselle Verbèna. “Would that I could assist monsieur! But I am only an ignorant little creature, and know nothing of the world! And I shall be ever at the bedside of mamma.”

“You will give me your address? You will let me inquire for the countess?”

“Willingly; but I do not know where I shall be. There will be a message at the wharf. To what hotel goes monsieur?”

“The Grand Hotel.”

“I will write there when I have seen mamma. And meanwhile——”

They were coming into harbour. The heights of Mustapha were visible, the woods

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of the Bois de Boulogne, the towers of the Hotel Splendid.

“Meanwhile, may I beg monsieur not to ——” She hesitated.

“Not to what?” asked Mr. Greyne most softly.

“Not to let anyone in England know that I am here?”

She paused. Mr. Greyne was silent, wondering. Mademoiselle Verbèna drooped her head.

“The world is so censorious. It might seem strange that I—that monsieur—a man young, handsome, fascinating—the same ship—I have no chaperon—*enfin*——”

She could get out no more. Her delicacy, her forethought touched Mr. Greyne to tears.

“Not a word,” he said. “You are right. The world is evil, and, as you say, I am a—not a word!”

He ventured to press her hand, as an elder brother might have pressed it. For the first time he realised that even to the husband of Mrs. Eustace Greyne the world might attribute— Goodness gracious! What might not the militia think, for instance?

He felt himself, for one moment, potentially a dog.

They parted in a whirl of Arabs on the quay. Mr. Greyne would have stayed to assist Mademoiselle Verbèna, but she bade him go.

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She whispered that she thought it "better" that they should not seem to—*enfin!*

"I will write to-morrow," she murmured. "*Au revoir!*"

On the last word she was gone. Mr. Greyne saw nothing but Arabs and hotel porters. Loneliness seemed to close in on him once more.

That very evening, after a cup of tea, he presented himself at the office of Rook near the Place du Gouvernement. As he came in he felt a little nervous. There were no tourists in the office, and a courteous clerk with a bright and searching eye at once took him in hand.

"What can we do for you, sir?"

"I am a stranger here," began Mr. Greyne.

"Quite so, sir, quite so."

The clerk twiddled his business-like thumbs, and looked inquiring.

"And being so," Mr. Greyne went on, "it is naturally my wish to see as much of the town as possible; as much as possible, you understand."

"You want a guide? Alphonso!"

Turning, he shouted to an inner room, from which in a moment emerged a short, stout, swarthy personage with a Jewish nose, a French head, an Arab eye with a squint in it, and a markedly Maltese expression.

"This is an excellent guide, sir," said the clerk. "He speaks twenty-five languages."

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The stout man, who—as Mr Greyne now perceived—had on a Swiss suit of clothes, a panama hat, and a pair of German elastic-sided boots, confessed in pigeon English, interspersed occasionally with a word or two of something which Mr. Greyne took to be Chinese, that such was undoubtedly the case.

“What do you wish to see? The mosque, the bazaars, St. Eugène, La Trappe, Mustapha, the baths of the Etat-Major, the Jardin d’Essai, the Villa-Anti-Juif, the——”

“One moment!” said Mr. Greyne.

He turned to the clerk.

“May I take a chair?”

“Be seated, sir, pray be seated, and confer with Alphonso.”

So saying, he gave himself to an enormous ledger, while Mr. Greyne took a chair opposite to Alphonso, who stood in a Moorish attitude looking apparently in the direction of Marseilles.

“I have come here,” said Mr. Greyne, lowering his voice, “with a purpose.”

“You wish to see the Belle Fatma. I will arrange it. She receives every evening in her house in the Rue——”

“One minute! One minute! You said the something ‘Fatma’?”

“The Belle Fatma, the most beautiful woman of Africa. She receives every——”

“Pardon me! One moment! Is this lady
——”

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Mr. Greyne paused.

“Sir?” said Alphonso, settling his Spanish neck-tie, and gazing steadily towards Marseilles.

“Is this lady—well, sinful?”

Alphonso threw up his hands with a wild Asiatic gesture.

“Sinful! La Belle Fatma! She is a lady of the utmost respectability known to all the town. You go to her house at eight, you take coffee upon the red sofas, you talk with La Belle, you see the dances and hear the music. Do not fear, sir; it is good, it is respectable as England, your country——”

“If it is respectable I don’t want to see it,” interposed Mr. Greyne. “It would be a waste of time.”

The clerk lifted his head from the ledger, and Alphonso, by means of standing with his back almost square to Mr. Greyne, and looking over his right shoulder, succeeded at length in fixing his eye upon him.

“I have not travelled here to see respectable things,” continued Mr. Greyne, with a slight blush. “Quite the contrary.”

“Sir?”

The voice of Alphonso seemed to have changed, to have taken on a hard, almost a menacing tone. Mr. Greyne thought of his beloved wife, of Merrin’s exercise-books, and clenched his hands, endeavouring to feel, and to go on, like a militiaman.

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“Quite the contrary,” he repeated firmly; “my object in coming to Africa is to—to search about in the Kasbah, and the disrep——” He choked, recovered himself, and continued: “Disreputable quarters of Algiers—hem——”

“What for, sir?”

The voice of Alphonso was certainly changed.

“What for?” said Mr. Greyne, growing purple. “For frailty.”

“Sir?”

“For frailty—for wickedness.”

A slight cackle emanated from the ledger, but immediately died away. A dead silence reigned in the office, broken only by the distant sound of the sea, and by the hard breathing of Alphonso, who had suddenly begun to pant.

“I wish to go to all the wicked places—*all!*”

The ledger cackled again more audibly. Mr. Greyne felt a prickling sensation run over him, but the thought of “Catherine” nerved him to his awful task.

“It is my wife’s express desire that I should do so,” he added desperately, quite forgetting Mrs. Greyne’s injunction to keep her dark in his desire to stand well with Rook’s.

The ledger went off into a hyena imitation, and Alphonso, turning still more away from Mr. Greyne, so as to get the eye fuller upon

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him, exclaimed, in a mixture of Aryan and Eurasian languages:

“Sir, I am a respectable, unmarried man. I was born in Buenos Ayres, educated in Smyrna, came of age in Constantinople, and have practised as guide in Bagdad and other particular cities. I refuse to have anything to do with you and your wife.”

So saying, he bounced into the inner room, and banged the door, while the ledger gave itself up to peals of merriment, and Mr. Greyne tottered forth upon the sea-front, bathed in a cold perspiration, and feeling more guilty than a murderer.

It was a staggering blow. He leaned over the stone parapet of the low wall, and let the soft breezes from the bay flit through his hair, and thought of Mrs. Greyne spurned by Alphonso. What was he to do? Kicked out of Rook's, to whom could he apply? There must be wickedness in Algiers, but where? He saw none, though night was falling and stout Frenchmen were already intent upon their absinthe.

“Does monsieur wish to see the Kasbah to-night?”

Was it a voice from heaven? He turned, and saw standing beside him a tall, thin, audacious-looking young man, with coal-black moustaches, magnificent eyes, and an air that was half-languid, half-serpentine.

“Who are you?”

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"I am a guide, monsieur. Here are my certificates."

He produced from the inner pocket of his coat a large bundle of dirty papers.

"If monsieur will deign to look them over."

But Mr. Greyne waved them away. What did he care for certificates? Here was a guide to African frailty. That was sufficient. He was in a desperate mood, and uttered desperate words.

"Look here," he said rapidly, "are you wicked?"

"Very wicked, monsieur."

"Good!"

"Wicked, monsieur."

"Right!"

"Wrong, monsieur."

"I mean that it is good for me that you are wicked."

"Monsieur is very good."

"Yes; but I wish to be—that is, to see the other thing. Can you undertake to show me everything shocking in Algiers?"

"But certainly, monsieur. For a consideration."

"Name your price."

"Two hundred pounds, monsieur."

Mr. Greyne started. It seemed a high figure.

"Monsieur thought it would be more? I make a special price, because I have taken a

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fancy to monsieur. I remove fifty pounds. Monsieur, of course, will pay all expenses."

"Of course, of course."

It was no time to draw back.

"How long will it take?"

"To see all the shocking?"

"Precisely."

"There is a good deal. A fortnight, three weeks. It depends on monsieur. If he is strong, and can do without sleep——"

"We shall have to be up at night?"

"Naturally."

"I shall go to bed during the day, and get through it in a fortnight."

"Perfectly."

"Be at the Grand Hotel to-night at ten o'clock precisely."

"At ten o'clock I will be there. Monsieur will pay a little in advance?"

"Here are twenty pounds," cried Mr. Greyne recklessly.

The audacious-looking young man took the notes with decision, made a graceful salute, and disappeared in the direction of the quay, while Mr. Greyne walked to his hotel, flushed with excitement, and feeling like the most desperate criminal in Africa. If the militia could see him now!

At dinner he drank a bottle of champagne, and afterwards smoked a strong cigar over his coffee and liqueur. As he was finishing these frantic enjoyments the head waiter—a per-

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sonage bearing a strong resemblance to an enlarged edition of Napoleon the First—approached him rather furtively, and, bending down, whispered in his ear:

“A gentleman has called to take monsieur to the Kasbah.”

Mr. Greyne started, and flushed a guilty red.

“I will come in a moment,” he answered, trying to assume a nonchalant voice, such as that in which a hardened major of dragoons announces that in his time he was a devil of a fellow.

The head waiter retired, looking painfully intelligent, and Mr. Greyne sprang upstairs, seized a Merrin’s exercise-book and a lead pencil, put on a dark overcoat, popped one of the Springfield revolvers into the pocket of it, and hastened down into the hall of the hotel, where the audacious-looking young man was standing, surrounded by saucy chasseurs in gay liveries and peaked caps, by Algerian waiters, and by German-Swiss porters, all of whom were smiling and looking choke-full of sympathetic comprehension.

“Ha!” said Mr. Greyne, still in the major’s voice. “There you are!”

“Behold me, monsieur.”

“That’s good.”

“Wicked, monsieur.”

“Well, let’s be off to the mosque.”

One of the chasseurs—a child of eight who

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was thankful that he knew no better—burst into a piping laugh. The waiters turned hastily away, and the German-Swiss porters retreated to the bureau with some activity.

“To the mosque—precisely, monsieur,” returned the guide, with complete self-possession.

They stepped out at once upon the pavement, where a carriage was in waiting.

“Where are we going?” inquired Mr. Greyne in an anxious voice.

“We are going to the heights to see the Ouled,” replied the guide. “*En avant!*”

He bounded in beside Mr. Greyne, the coachman cracked his whip, the horses trotted. They were off upon their terrible pilgrimage.

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V

ON the following afternoon, at a quarter to three, when Mr. Greyne came down to breakfast, he found, lying beside the boiled eggs, a note directed to him in a feminine handwriting. He tore it open with trembling fingers, and read as follows:—

1 RUE DU PETIT NEGRE.

DEAR MONSIEUR,—I am here. Poor mamma is in the hospital. I am allowed to see her twice a day. At all other times I remain alone, praying and weeping. I trust that monsieur has passed a good night. For me, I was sleepless, thinking of mamma. I go now to church.

ADELE VERBENA.

He laid this missive down, and sighed deeply. How strangely innocent it was, how simple, how sincere! There were white souls in Algiers—yes, even in Algiers. Strange that he should know one! Strange that he, who had filled a Merrin's exercise-book with tiny writing, and had even overflowed on to the cover after "crossing" many pages, should receive the child-like confidences of one! "I go now to the church." Tears came into his eyes as he laid the letter down beside a pile of buttered toast over which the burning afternoon sun of Africa was shining.

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“Monsieur will take milk and sugar?”

It was the head waiter's Napoleonic voice. Mr. Greyne controlled himself. The man was smiling intelligently. All the staff of the hotel smiled intelligently at Mr. Greyne to-day—the waiters, the porters, the chasseurs. The child of eight who was thankful that he knew no better had greeted him with a merry laugh as he came down to breakfast, and an “*Oh, là, là!*” which had elicited a rebuke from the proprietor. Indeed, a wave of human sympathy flowed upon Mr. Greyne, whose ashy face and dull, washed-out eyes betrayed the severity of his night-watch.

“Monsieur will feel better after a little food.”

The head waiter handed the buttered toast with bland majesty, at the same time shooting a reproving glance at the little chasseur, who was peeping from behind the door at the afternoon breakfast.

“I feel perfectly well,” replied Mr. Greyne, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

“Still, monsieur will feel much better after a little food.”

Mr. Greyne began to toy with an egg.

“You know Algiers?” he asked.

“I was born here, monsieur. If monsieur wishes to explore to-night again the Kasbah I can——”

But Mr. Greyne stopped him with a gesture that was almost fierce.

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"Where is the Rue du Petit Nègre?"

"Monsieur wishes to go there to-night?"

"I wish to go there now, directly I have finished break—lunch."

The head waiter's face was wreathed with humorous surprise.

"But monsieur is wonderful—superb! Never have I seen a traveller like monsieur!"

He gazed at Mr. Greyne with tropical appreciation.

"Monsieur had better have a carriage. The street is difficult to find."

"Order me one. I shall start at once."

Mr. Greyne pushed away the sunlit buttered toast, and got up.

"Monsieur is superb. Never have I seen a traveller like monsieur!"

Napoleon's voice was almost reverent. He hastened out, followed slowly by Mr. Greyne.

"A carriage for monsieur! Monsieur desires to go to the Rue du Petit Nègre!"

The staff of the hotel gathered about the door as if to speed a royal personage, and Mr. Greyne noticed that their faces too were touched with an almost startled reverence. He stepped into the carriage, signed feebly, but with determination, to the Arab coachman, and was driven away, followed by a parting "*Oh, là, là!*" from the chasseur, uttered in a voice that sounded shrill with sheer amazement.

Through winding, crowded streets he went,

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by bazaars and Moorish bath-houses, mosques and Catholic churches, barracks and cafés, till at length the carriage turned into an alley that crept up a steep hill. It moved on a little way, and then stopped.

“Monsieur must descend here,” said the coachman. “Mount the steps, go to the right and then to the left. Near the summit of the hill he will find the Rue du Petit Nègre. Shall I wait for monsieur?”

“Yes.”

The coachman began to make a cigarette, while Mr. Greyne set forth to follow his directions, and, at length, stood before an arch, which opened into a courtyard adorned with orange-trees in tubs, and paved with blue and white tiles. Around this courtyard was a three-storey house with a flat roof, and from a bureau near a little fountain a stout Frenchwoman called to demand his business. He asked for Mademoiselle Verbèna, and was at once shown into a saloon lined with chairs covered with yellow rep, and begged to take a seat. In two minutes Mademoiselle Verbèna appeared, drying her eyes with a tiny pocket-handkerchief, and forcing a little pathetic smile of welcome. Mr. Greyne clasped her hand in silence. She sat down in a rep chair at his right, and they looked at each other.

“*Mais, mon Dieu!* How monsieur is changed!” cried the Levantine. “If madame

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could see him! What has happened to monsieur?"

"Miss Verbèna," replied Mr. Greyne, "I have seen the Ouled on the heights."

A spasm crossed the Levantine's face. She put her handkerchief to it for a moment.

"What is an Ouled?" she inquired, withdrawing it.

"I dare not tell you," he replied solemnly.

"But indeed I wish to know, so that I may sympathise with monsieur."

Mr. Greyne hesitated, but his heart was full; he felt the need of sympathy. He looked at Mademoiselle Verbèna, and a great longing to unburden himself overcame him.

"An Ouled," he replied, "is a dancing-girl from the desert of Sahara."

"*Mon Dieu!* How does she dance? Is it a valse, a polka, a quadrille?"

"No. Would that it were!"

And Mr. Greyne, unable further to govern his desire for full expression, gave Mademoiselle Verbèna a slightly Bowdlerised description of the dances of the desert. She heard him with amazement.

"How terrible!" she exclaimed when he had finished. "And does one pay much to see such steps of the Evil One?"

"I gave her twenty pounds. Abdallah Jack——"

"Abdallah Jack?"

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“My guide informed me that was the price. He tells me it is against the law, and that each time an Ouled dances she risks being thrown into prison.”

“Poor lady! How sad to have to earn one’s bread by such devices, instead of by teaching to the sweet little ones of monsieur the sympathetic grammar of one’s native country.”

Mr. Greyne was touched to the quick by this allusion, which brought, as in a vision, the happy home in Belgrave Square before him.

“You are an angel!” he exclaimed.

Mademoiselle Verbèna shook her head.

“And this poor Ouled, you will go to her again?”

“Yes. It seems that she is in communication with all the—the—well, all the odd people of Algiers, and that one can only get at them through her.”

“Indeed?”

“Abdallah Jack tells me that while I am here I should pay her a weekly salary, and that, in return, I shall see all the terrible ceremonies of the Arabs. I have decided to do so——”

“Ah, you have decided!”

For a moment Mr. Greyne started. There seemed a new sound in Mademoiselle Verbèna’s voice, a gleam in her dark brown eyes.

“Yes,” he said, looking at her in wonder. “But I have not yet told Abdallah Jack.”

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The Levantine looked gently sad again.

"Ah," she said in her usual pathetic voice, "how my heart bleeds for this poor Ouled. By the way, what is her name?"

"Aishoush."

"She is beautiful?"

"I hardly know. She was so painted, so tattooed, so very—so very different from Mrs. Eustace Greyne."

"How sad! How terrible! Ah, but you must long for the dear bonnet strings of madame?"

Did he? As she spoke Mr. Greyne asked himself the question. Shocked as he was, fatigued by his researches, did he wish that he were back again in Belgrave Square, drinking barley water, pasting notices of his wife's achievements into the new album, listening while she read aloud from the manuscript of her latest novel? He wondered, and—how strange, how almost terrible—he was not sure.

"Is it not so?" murmured Mademoiselle Verbèna.

"Naturally I miss my beloved wife," said Mr. Greyne with a certain awkwardness. "How is your poor, dear mother?"

Tears came at once into the Levantine's eyes.

"Very, very ill, monsieur. Still there is a chance—just a chance that she may not die. Ah, when I sit here all alone in this strange

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place, I feel that she will perish, that soon I shall be quite deserted in this cruel, cruel world!"

The tears began to flow down her cheeks with determination. Mr. Greyne was terribly upset.

"You must cheer up," he exclaimed. "You must hope for the best."

"Sitting here alone, how can I?"

She sobbed.

"Sitting here alone—very true!"

A sudden thought, a number of sudden thoughts, struck him.

"You must not sit here alone."

"Monsieur!"

"You must come out. You must drive. You must see the town, distract yourself."

"But how? Can a—a girl go about alone in Algiers?"

"Heaven forbid! No; I will escort you."

"Monsieur!"

A smile of innocent, girlish joy transformed her face, but suddenly she was grave again.

"Would it be right, *convenable*?"

Mr. Greyne was reckless. The dog potential rose up in him again.

"Why not? And, besides, who knows us here? Not a soul."

"That is true."

"Put on your bonnet. Let us start at once!"

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“But I do not wear the bonnet. I am not like madame.”

“To be sure. Your hat.”

And as she flew to obey him, Mr. Eustace Greyne found himself impiously thanking the powers that be for this strange chance of going on the spree with a toque. When Mademoiselle Verbèna returned he was looking almost rakish. He eyed her neat black hat and close-fitting black jacket with a glance not wholly unlike that of a militiaman. In her hand she held a vivid scarlet parasol.

“Monsieur,” she said, “it is terrible, this *ombrelle*, when mamma lies at death’s door. But what can I do? I have no other, and cannot afford to buy one. The sun is fierce. I dare not expose myself to it without a shelter.”

She seemed really distressed as she opened the parasol, and spread the vivid silk above her pretty black-clothed figure; but Mr. Greyne thought the effect was brilliant, and ventured to say so. As they passed the bureau by the fountain on their way out the stout Frenchwoman cast an approving glance at Mademoiselle Verbèna.

“The little rat will not see much more of the little negro now,” she murmured to herself. “After all, the English have their uses.”

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VI

IN Belgrave Square Mrs. Eustace Greyne was beginning to get slightly uneasy. Several things combined to make her so. In the first place, Mademoiselle Verbèna had never returned from her mother's Parisian bedside, and had not even written a line to say how the dear parent was, and when the daughter's nursing occupation was likely to be over. In the second place, Adolphus, in consequence of the Levantine's absence, had totally lost his grasp, always uncertain, upon the irregular verbs. In the third place, Darrell, the valet, had returned to London the day after his departure from it, minus not only his master's dressing-case, but minus everything he possessed. His story was that, while waiting at the station in Paris for his master's appearance, he had entered into conversation with an agreeable stranger, and been beguiled into the acceptance of an absinthe at a café just outside. After swallowing the absinthe he remembered nothing more till he came to himself in a deserted waiting-room at the Gare du Nord, back to which he had been mysteriously conveyed. In his pocket was no money, no watch, only the return half of a second-class ticket from London to Paris. He, therefore, wandered about the streets till

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morning broke, and then came back to London a crestfallen and miserable man, bemoaning his untoward fate, and cursing "them blasted Frenchies" from the bottom of his British heart.

Mrs. Greyne's anxiety on her husband's behalf, now that he was thrown absolutely unattended upon the inhospitable shores of Africa, was not lessened by a fourth circumstance, which, indeed, worried her far more than all the others put together. This was Mr. Greyne's prolonged absence from her side. Precisely one calendar month had now elapsed since he had buried his face in her prune bonnet strings at Victoria Station, and there seemed no prospect of his return. He wrote to her, indeed, frequently, and his letters were full of wistful regret and longing to be once more safe in the old homestead in Belgrave Square, drinking barley water, and pasting Romeike & Curtice notices into the new album which lay, gaping for him, upon the table of his sanctum. But he did not come; nay, more, he wrote plainly that there was no prospect of his coming for the present. It seemed that the wickedness of Africa was very difficult to come at. It did not lie upon the surface, but was hidden far down in depths to which the ordinary tourist found it almost impossible to penetrate. In his numerous letters Mr. Greyne described his heroic and unremitting exertions to fill the Merrin's note-books with

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matter that would be suitable for the purging of humanity. He set out in full his interview with Alphonso at the office of Rook, and his definite rejection by that cosmopolitan official. According to the letters, after this event he had spent no less than a fortnight searching in vain for any sign of wickedness in the Algerian capital. He had frequented the cafés, the public bars, the theatres, the churches. He had been to the Velodrome. He had sat by the hour in the Jardin d'Essai. At night he had strolled in the fairs and hung about the circus. Yet nowhere had he been able to perceive anything but the most innocent pleasure, the simple merriment of a gay and guileless population to whom the idea of crime seemed as foreign as the idea of singing the English national anthem.

During the third week it was true that matters—always according to Mr. Greyne's letters home—slightly improved. While walking near the quay, in active search for nautical outrage, he saw an Arab dock labourer, who had been over-smoking kief, run amuck, and knock down a couple of respectable snake-charmers who were on the point of embarkation for Tunis with their reptiles. This incident had filed up a half-score of pages in exercise-book number one, and had flooded Mr. Greyne with hope and aspiration. But it was followed by a stagnant lull which had lasted for days, and had only been disturbed by the

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trifling incident of a gentleman in the Jewish quarter of the town setting fire to a neighbour's bazaar, in the very natural endeavour to find a French half-penny which he had chanced to drop among a bale of carpets while looking in to drive a soft bargain. As Mrs. Greyne wired to Algiers, such incidents were of no value to "Catherine."

A very active interchange of views had gone on between the husband and wife as time went by, and the book was at a standstill. At first Mrs. Greyne contented herself with daily letters, but latterly she had resorted to wires, explanatory, condemnatory, hortatory, and even comminatory. She began bitterly to regret her husband's well-proven innocence, and wished she had despatched an uncle of hers by marriage, an ex-captain in the Royal Navy, who, she began to feel certain, would have been able to find far more frailty in Algiers than poor Eustace, in his simplicity, would ever come at. She even began to wish that she had crossed the sea in person, and herself boldly set about the ingathering of the material for which she was so impatiently waiting.

Her uneasiness was brought to a head by a letter from a house agent, stating that the corner mansion in Park Lane next to the Duke of Ebury's was being nibbled at by a Venezuelan millionaire. She wired this terrible fact at once to Africa, adding, at an enormous expenditure of cash:

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This will never do. You are too innocent, and cannot see what lies before you. Obtain assistance. Go to the British consul.

Mr. Greyne at once cabled back:

Am following your advice. Will wire result. Regret my innocence, but am distressed that you should so utterly condemn it.

Upon receiving this telegram at night, before a lonely dinner, Mrs. Eustace Greyne was deeply moved. She felt she had been hasty. She knew that to very few women was it given to have a husband so free from all masculine infirmities as Mr. Greyne. At the same time there was "Catherine," there was the mansion in Park Lane, there was the Venezuelan millionaire. She began to feel distracted, and, for the first time in her life, refused to partake of sweetbreads fried in mushroom ketchup, a dish which she had greatly affected from the time when she wrote her first short story. While she was in the very act of waving away this delicacy a footman came in with a foreign telegram. She opened it quickly, and read as follows:—

British consul horrified; was ignominiously expelled from consulate; great scandal; am much upset, but will never give in, for your sake.

EUSTACE.

As the dread meaning of these words penetrated at length to Mrs. Greyne's voluminous

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brain a deep flush overspread her noble features. She rose from the table with a determination that struck awe to the hearts of the powdered underlings, and, drawing herself up to her full height, exclaimed:

“Send Mrs. Forbes at once to my study, if you please—at once, do you understand?”

In a moment Mrs. Forbes, who was the great novelist’s maid, appeared on the threshold of the oracle’s lair. She was a sober-looking, black-silk personage, who always wore a pork-pie cap in the house, and a Mother Hubbard bonnet out of it. Having been in service with Mrs. Greyne ever since the latter penned her last minor poetry—Mrs. Greyne had been a minor poet for three years soon after she put her hair up—Mrs. Forbes had acquired a certain literary expression of countenance and a manner that was decidedly prosy. She read a good deal after her supper of an evening, and was wont to be the arbiter when any literary matter was discussed in the servants’ hall.

“Madam?” she said, respectfully entering the room, and bending the pork-pie cap forward in an attentive attitude.

Mrs. Greyne was silent for a moment. She appeared to be thinking deeply. Mrs. Forbes gently closed the door, and sighed. It was nearly her supper-time, and she felt pensive.

“Madam?” she said again.

Mrs. Greyne looked up. A strange fire burned in her large eyes.

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“Mrs. Forbes,” she said at length, with weighty deliberation, “the mission of woman in the world is a great one.”

“Very true, madam. My own words to Butler Phillips no longer ago than dinner this midday.”

“It is the protecting of man—neither more nor less.”

“My own statement, madam, to Second Footman Archibald this self-same day at the tea-board.”

“Man needs guidance, and looks for it to us—or rather to me.”

At the last word Mrs. Forbes pinched her lips together, and appeared older than her years and sourer than her normal temper.

“At this moment, Mrs. Forbes,” continued Mrs. Greyne, with rising fervour, “he looks for it to me from Africa. From that dark continent he stretches forth his hands to me in humble supplication.”

“Mr. Greyne has not been taken with another of his bilious attacks, I hope, madam?” said Mrs. Forbes.

Mrs. Greyne smiled. The ignorance of the humbly born entertained her. It was so simple, so transparent.

“You fail to understand me,” she answered. “But never mind; others have done the same.”

She thought of her reviewers. Mrs. Forbes smiled. She also could be entertained.

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“Madam?” she inquired once more after a pause.

“I shall leave for Africa to-morrow morning,” said Mrs. Greyne. “You will accompany me.”

There was a dead silence.

“You will accompany me. Do you understand? Obtain assistance from the housemaids in the packing. Select my quietest gowns, my least conspicuous bonnets. I have my reasons for wishing, while journeying to Africa and remaining there, to pass, if possible, unnoticed.”

Again there was a pause. Mrs. Greyne looked up at Mrs. Forbes, and observed a dogged expression upon her countenance.

“What is the matter?” she asked the maid.

“Do we go by Paris, madam?” said Mrs. Forbes.

“Certainly.”

“Then, madam, I’m very sorry, but I couldn’t risk it, not if it was ever so——”

“Why not? Why this fear of Lutetia?”

“Madam, I’m not afraid of any Lutetia as ever wore apron, but to go to Paris to be drugged with absint, and put away in a third-class waiting-room like a package—I couldn’t madam, not even if I have to leave your service.”

Mrs. Greyne recognised that the episode of the valet had struck home to the lady’s maid.

“But you will not leave my side.”

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"They will absint you, madam."

"But you will travel first in a sleeping-car."

Mrs. Forbes put up her hand to her pork-pie cap, as if considering.

"Very well, madam, to oblige you I will undergo it," she said at length. "But I would not do the like for another living lady."

"I will raise your wages. You are a faithful creature."

"Does master expect us, madam?" asked Mrs. Forbes as she prepared to retire.

A bright and tender look stole into Mrs. Greyne's intellectual face.

"No," she replied.

She turned her large and beaming eyes full upon the maid.

"Mrs. Forbes," she said, with an amount of emotion that was very rare in her, "I am going to tell you a great truth."

"Madam?" said Mrs. Forbes respectfully.

"The sweetest moments of life, those which lift man nearest heaven, and make him thankful for the great gift of existence, are sometimes those which are unforeseen."

She was thinking of Mr. Greyne's ecstasy when, upon the inhospitable African shore where he was now enduring such tragic misfortunes, he perceived the majestic form of his loved one—his loved one whom he believed to be in Belgrave Square—coming towards him to soothe, to comfort, to direct. She brushed away a tear.

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“Go, Mrs. Forbes,” she said.

And Mrs. Forbes retired, smiling.

An epic might well be written on the great novelist's journey to Africa, upon her departure from Charing Cross, shrouded in a black gauze veil, her silent thought as the good ship *Empress* rode cork-like upon the Channel waves, her ascetic lunch—a captain's biscuit and a glass of water—at the buffet at Calais, her arrival in Paris when the shades of night had fallen. An epic might well be written. Perhaps some day it will be, by herself.

In Paris she suffered a good deal on account of Mrs. Forbes, who, in her fear of “absint,” became hysterical, and caused not a little annoyance by accusing various inoffensive French travellers of nefarious designs upon her property and person. In the Gulf of Lyons she suffered even more, and as, unluckily, the wind was contrary and the sea prodigious during the whole of the passage across the Mediterranean, both she and Mrs. Forbes arrived at Algiers four hours late, in a condition which may be more easily imagined than properly described.

Genius in thrall to the body, and absolutely dependent upon green chartreuse for its flickering existence, is no subject for even a sympathetic pen. Sufficient to say that, when the ship came in under the lights of Algiers, the crowd of shouting Arabs was struck to silence by the spectacle of Mrs. Greyne and Mrs.

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Forbes endeavouring to disembark, in bonnets that were placed seaward upon the head instead of landward, unbuttoned boots, and gowns soaked with the attentions of the waves.

After being gently and permanently relieved of their light hand-baggage, the mistress and maid, who seemed greatly overwhelmed by the sight of Africa, and who moved—or rather were carried—as in a dream, were placed reverently in the nearest omnibus, and conveyed to the farthest hotel, which was situated upon a lofty hill above the town. Here a slightly painful scene took place.

Having been assisted by the staff into a Moorish hall, Mrs. Greyne inquired in a reticent voice for her husband, and was politely informed that there was no person of the name of Greyne in the hotel. For a moment she seemed threatened with dissolution, but with a supreme effort calling upon her mighty brain she surmised that her husband was possibly passing under a pseudonym in order to throw America off the scent. She, therefore, demanded to have the guests then present in the hotel at once paraded before her. As there was some difficulty about this—the guests being then at dinner—she whispered for the visitors' book, thinking that, perchance, Mr. Greyne had inscribed his name there, and that the staff, being foreign, did not recognise it as murmured by herself. The book was

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brought, upon its cover in golden letters the words: "Hôtel Loubet et Majestic." Then explanations of a somewhat disagreeable nature occurred, and Mrs. Greyne and Mrs. Forbes, after a heavy payment had been exacted for their conveyance to a place they had desired not to go to, were carried forth, and consigned to another vehicle, which at length brought them, on the stroke of nine, to the Grand Hotel.

Having been placed reverently in the brilliantly-lighted hall, they were surrounded by the proprietor, the *maître d'hôtel* and his assistants, the porters, and the chasseurs, with all of whom Mr. Greyne was now familiar. Brandy and water having been supplied, together with smelling-salts and burnt feathers, Mrs. Greyne roused herself from an acute attack of lethargy, and asked for Mr. Greyne. A joyous smile ran round the circle.

"Monsieur Greyne," said the proprietor, "who is living here for the winter?"

"Mr. Eustace Greyne," murmured the great novelist, grasping her bonnet with both hands.

The *maître d'hôtel* drew nearer.

"Madame wishes to see Monsieur Greyne?" he asked.

"I do—at once."

A blessed consciousness of Mother Earth was gradually beginning to steal over her. She even strove feebly to sit up on her chair, a

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German-Swiss porter of enormous size assisting her.

"But Monsieur Greyne is out."

"Out?"

"Yes, madame. Monsieur Greyne is always out at night."

The eyes of the little chasseur who knew no better began to twinkle. Mrs. Forbes gave a slight cough. Tears filled the novelist's eyes.

"God bless my Eustace!" she murmured, deeply touched by this evidence of his devotion to her interests.

"Madame says——" asked the proprietor.

"Where does Mr. Greyne go?" inquired the novelist.

"To the Kasbah, madame."

"I knew it!" cried Mrs. Greyne, with returning animation. "I knew it would be so!"

"Madame is acquainted with Monsieur Greyne?" said the *maître d'hôtel*, while the little crowd gathered more closely about the wave-worn group.

"I am Mrs. Eustace Greyne," returned the great novelist recklessly. "I am the wife of Mr. Eustace Greyne."

There was a moment of supreme silence. Then a loud, an even piercing "*Oh, là, là!*" broke upon the air, succeeded instantaneously by a burst of laughter that seemed to thrill with all the wild blessedness of boyhood. It came, of course, from the little chasseur; it came, and stayed. Nothing could stop it, and

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eventually the happy child had to be carried forth upon the sea-front to enjoy his innocent mirth at leisure and in solitude beneath the African stars. Mrs. Greyne did not notice his disappearance. She was intent upon important matters.

“At what time does Mr. Greyne usually set forth?” she asked of the proprietor, whose face now bore a strangely twisted appearance, as if afflicted by a toothache.

“Immediately after dinner, madame, if not before. Of late it has generally been before.”

“And he stays out late?”

“Very late, madame.”

The twisted appearance began to seem infectious. It was visible upon the faces of most of those surrounding Mrs. Greyne and Mrs. Forbes. Indeed, even the latter showed some signs of it, although the large shadow cast over her features by the hind side of her Mother Hubbard bonnet to some extent disguised them from the public view.

“Till what hour?” pursued Mrs. Greyne in a voice of almost yearning tenderness and pity.

“Well, madame”—the proprietor displayed some slight confusion—“I really can hardly say. The *maître d’hôtel* can perhaps inform you.”

Mrs. Greyne turned her ox-like eyes upon the enlarged edition of Napoleon the First.

“Monsieur Greyne seldom returns before

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seven or eight o'clock in the morning, madame. He then retires to bed, and comes down to breakfast at about four o'clock in the afternoon."

Mrs. Greyne was touched to the very quick. Her husband was sacrificing his rest, his health—nay, perhaps even his very life—in her service. It was well she had come, well that a period was to be put to these terrible researches. They should be stopped at once, even this very night. Better a thousand literary failures than that her husband's existence should be placed in jeopardy. She rose suddenly from her chair, tottered, gasped, recovered herself, and spoke.

"Prepare dinner for me at once," she said, "and order a carriage and a competent guide to be before the door in half-an-hour."

"Madame is going out? But madame is ill, tired!"

"It matters not."

"Where does madame wish to go?"

"I am going to the Kasbah to find my husband."

"I will escort madame."

The proprietor, the *maitre d'hôtel*, the waiters, the porters, the chasseurs, Mrs. Greyne and Mrs. Forbes, all turned about to face the determined speaker.

And there before them, his dark eyes gleaming, his long moustaches bristling fiercely—there stood Abdallah Jack.

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VII

MAN is a self-deceiver. It must, therefore, ever be a doubtful point whether Mr. Eustace Greyne, during his residence in Africa, absolutely lost sight of his sense of duty; whether, beguiled by the lively attentions of a fiercely foreign town, he deliberately resolved to take his pleasure regardless of consequences and of the sacred ties of Belgrave Square. We prefer to think that some vague idea of combining two duties—that which he owed to himself and that which he owed to Mrs. Greyne—moved him in all he did, and that the subterfuge into which he was undoubtedly led was not wholly selfish, not wholly criminal. Nevertheless, that he had lied to his beloved wife is certain. Even while she sat over a cutlet and a glass of claret in the white-and-gold dining-room of the Grand Hotel, preparatory to her departure to the Kasbah with Abdallah Jack, the dozen of Merrin's exercise-books lay upstairs in Mr. Greyne's apartments filled to the brim with African frailty. Already there was material enough in their pages to furnish forth a library of "Catherines." Yet Mr. Greyne still lingered far from his home, and wired to that home fabricated accounts of the singular innocence of Algiers. He even al-

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lowed it to be supposed that his own innocence stood in the way of his fulfilment of Mrs. Greyne's behests—he who could now have given points in knowledge of the world to whole regiments of militiamen!

It was not right, and, doubtless, he must stand condemned by every moralist. But let it not be forgotten that he had fallen under the influence of a Levantine.

Mademoiselle Verbèna's mother, hidden in some unnamed hospital of Algiers, appeared to be one of those ingenious elderly ladies who can hover indefinitely upon the brink of death without actually dying. During the whole time that Mr. Greyne had been in Africa her state had been desperate, yet she still clung to life. As her daughter said, she possessed extraordinary vitality, and this vitality seemed to have been inherited by her child. Despite her grave anxieties Mademoiselle Verbèna succeeded in sustaining a remarkable cheeriness, and even a fascinating vivacity, when in the company of others. As she said to Mr. Greyne, she did not think it right to lay her burdens upon the shoulders of her neighbours. She, therefore, forced herself to appear contented, even at various moments gay, when she and Mr. Greyne were lunching, dining, or supping together, were driving upon the front, sailing upon the azure waters of the bay, riding upon the heights beyond El-Biar, or, ensconced in a sumptuous private box, listening

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to the latest French farce at one or another of the theatres. Only one day, when they had driven out to the monastery at La Trappe de Staouëli, did a momentary cloud descend upon her piquant features, and she explained this by the frank confession that she had always wished to become a nun, but had been hindered from following her vocation by the necessity of earning money to support her aged parents.

Mr. Greyne had never seen the Ouled since his first evening in Algiers, but he still paid her a weekly salary, through Abdallah Jack, who explained to him that the interesting lady, in a discreet retirement, was perpetually occupied in arranging the exhibitions of African frailty at which he so frequently assisted. She was, in fact, earning her liberal salary. Mademoiselle Verbèna and Abdallah Jack had met on several occasions, and Mr. Greyne had introduced the latter to the former as his guide, and had generously praised his abilities; but Mademoiselle Verbèna took very little notice of him, and, as time went on, Abdallah Jack seemed to conceive a most distressing dislike of her. On several occasions he advised Mr. Greyne not to frequent her company so assiduously, and when Mr. Greyne asked him to explain the meaning of his monitions he took refuge in vague generalities and Eastern imagery. He had a profound contempt for women as companions, which grieved Mr. Greyne's Western ideas, and evidently

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thought that Mademoiselle Verbèna ought to be clapped forthwith into a long veil, and put away in a harem behind an iron grille. When Mr. Greyne explained the English point of view Abdallah Jack took refuge in a sulky silence; but during the week immediately preceding the arrival of Mrs. Greyne his temper had become actively bad, and Mr. Greyne began seriously to consider whether it would not be better to pay him a last *douceur*, and tell him to go about his business.

Before doing this, however, Mr. Greyne desired to have one more interview with the mysterious Ouled on the heights, to whom he owed the knowledge which would henceforth enable him to cut out the militia. He said so to Abdallah Jack. The latter agreed sulkily to arrange it; and matters so fell out that on the night of Mrs. Greyne's arrival her husband was seated in a room in one of the remotest houses of the Kasbah, watching the Ouled's mysterious evolutions, while Mademoiselle Verbèna—as she herself had informed Mr. Greyne—sat in the hospital by the bedside of her still dying mother. Abdallah Jack had apparently been most anxious to assist at Mr. Greyne's interview with the Ouled, but Mr. Greyne had declined to allow this. The evil temper of the guide was beginning to get thoroughly upon his employer's nerves, and even the natural desire to have an interpreter at hand was overborne by the dislike of Abdallah

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Jack's morose eyes and sarcastic speeches about women. Moreover, the Ouled spoke a word or two of uncertain French.

Thus, therefore, things fell out, and such was the precise situation when Mrs. Greyne flicked a crumb from her chocolate brocade gown, tied her bonnet strings, and rose from table to set forth to the Kasbah with Abdallah Jack.

It was a radiant night. In the clear sky the stars shone brilliantly, looking down upon the persistent convulsions of the little chasseur, who had not yet recovered from his attack of merriment on learning who Mrs. Greyne was. The sea, quite calm now that the great novelist was no longer upon it, lapped softly along the curving shores of the bay. The palm-trees of the town garden where the band plays on warm evenings waved lazily in the soft and scented breeze. The hooded figures of the Arabs lounged against the stone wall that girdles the sea-front. In the brilliantly-illuminated restaurants the rich French population gathered about the little tables, while the withered beggars stared in upon the oyster shells, the champagne bottles, and the feathers in the women's audacious hats.

When Mrs. Greyne emerged upon the pavement before the Grand Hotel, attended by Mrs. Forbes and the guide, she paused for a moment, and cast a searching glance upon the fairy scene. In this voluptuous evening and

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strange environment life seemed oddly dream-like. She scarcely felt like Mrs. Greyne. Possibly Mrs. Forbes also felt unlike herself, for she suddenly placed one hand upon her left side, and tottered. Abdallah Jack supported her. She screamed aloud.

"Madam!" she said. "It is the vertigo. I am overtaken!"

She was really ill; her face, indeed, became the colour of a plover's egg.

"Let me go to bed, madam," she implored. "It is the vertigo, madam. I am overtaken!"

Under ordinary circumstances Mrs. Greyne would have prescribed a dose of Kasbah air, but to-night she felt strange, and she wanted strangeness. Mrs. Forbes with the vertigo, in a small carriage, would be inappropriate. She, therefore, bade her retire, mounted into the vehicle with Abdallah Jack, and was quickly driven away, her bonnet strings floating upon the winsome wind.

"You know my husband?" she asked softly of the guide.

Abdallah Jack replied in French that he rather thought he did.

"How is he looking?" continued Mrs. Greyne in a slightly yearning voice. "My Eustace!" she added to herself, "my devoted one!"

"Monsieur Greyne is pale as washed linen upon the Kasbah wall," replied Abdallah Jack, lighting a cigarette, and wreathing the great

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novelist in its grey-blue smoke. "He is thin as the Spahi's lance, he is nervous as the leaves of the eucalyptus-tree when the winds blow from the north."

Mrs. Greyne was seriously perturbed.

"Would I had come before!" she murmured, with serious self-reproach.

"Monsieur Greyne is worse than all the English," pursued Abdallah Jack in a voice that sounded to Mrs. Greyne decidedly sinister. "He is worse than the tourists of Rook, who laugh in the doorways of the mosques and twine in their hair the dried lizards of the Sahara. Even the guide of Rook rejected him. I only would undertake him because I am full of evil."

Mrs. Greyne began to feel distinctly uncomfortable, and to wish she had not been so ready to pander to Mrs. Forbes' vertigo. She stole a sidelong glance at her strange companion. The carriage was small. The end of his bristling black moustache was very near. What he said of Mr. Greyne did not disturb her, because she knew that her Eustace had sacrificed his reputation to do her service; but what he said about himself was not reassuring.

"I think you must be doing yourself an injustice," she said in a rather agitated voice.

"Madame?"

"I do not believe you are so bad as you imply," she continued.

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The carriage turned with a jerk out of the brilliantly-lighted thoroughfare that runs along the sea into a narrow side street, crowded with native Jews, and dark with shadows.

“Madame does not know me.”

The exact truth of this observation struck home, like a dagger, to the mind of Mrs. Greyne.

“I am a wicked person,” added Abdallah Jack, with a profound conviction. “That is why Monsieur Greyne chose me as his guide.”

The novelist began to quake. Her chocolate brocade fluttered. Was she herself to learn at first hand, and on her first evening in Africa, enough about African frailty to last her for the rest of her life? And how much more of life would remain to her after her stock of knowledge had been thus increased? The carriage turned into a second side street, narrower and darker than the last.

“Are we going right?” she said apprehensively.

“No, madame; we are going wrong—we are going to the wicked part of the city.”

“But—but—you are sure Mr. Greyne will be there?”

Abdallah Jack laughed sardonically.

“Monsieur Greyne is never anywhere else. Monsieur Greyne is wicked as is a mad Touareg of the desert.”

“I don’t think you quite understand my husband,” said Mrs. Greyne, feeling in duty

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bound to stand up for her poor, maligned Eustace. "Whatever he may have done he has done at my special request."

"Madame says?"

"I say that in all his proceedings while in Algiers Mr. Greyne has been acting under my directions."

Abdallah Jack fixed his enormous eyes steadily upon her.

"You are his wife, and told him to come here, and to do as he has done?"

"Ye-yes," faltered Mrs. Greyne, for the first time in her life feeling as if she were being escorted towards the criminal dock by a jailer with Puritan tendencies.

"Then it is true what they say on the shores of the great canal," he remarked composedly.

"What do they say?" inquired Mrs. Greyne.

"That England is a land of female devils," returned the guide as the carriage plunged into a filthy alley, between two rows of blind houses, and began to ascend a steep hill.

Mrs. Greyne gasped. She opened her lips to protest vigorously, but her head swam—either from indignation or from fatigue—and she could not utter a word. The horses mounted like cats upward into the dense blackness, from which dropped down the faint sounds of squealing music and of hoarse cries and laughter. The wheels bounded over the stones, sank into the deep ruts, scraped against the sides

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of the unlighted houses. And Abdallah Jack sat staring at Mrs. Greyne as an English clergyman's wife might stare at the appalling rites of some deadly cannibal encountered in a far-off land, with a stony wonder, a sort of paralysed curiosity.

Suddenly the carriage stopped on a piece of waste land covered with small pebbles. Abdallah Jack sprang out.

"Why do we stop?" said Mrs. Greyne, turning as pale as ashes.

"The carriage can go no farther. Madame must walk."

Mrs. Greyne began to tremble.

"We are to leave the coachman?"

"I shall escort madame, alone."

The great novelist's tongue cleaved to the roof of her mouth. She felt like a Merrin's exercise-book, every leaf of which was covered with African frailty. However, there was no help for it. She had to descend, and stand among the pebbles.

"Where are we going?"

Abdallah Jack waved his hand towards a stone rampart dimly seen in the faint light that emanated from the starry sky.

"Down there into the alley of the Dead Dervishes."

Mrs. Greyne could not repress a cry of horror. At that moment she would have given a thousand pounds to have Mrs. Forbes at her side.

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Abdallah Jack grasped her by the hand, and led her ruthlessly forward. Gazing with terror-stricken eyes over the crumbling rampart of the Kasbah, she saw the city far below her, the lights of the streets, the lights of the ships in harbour. She heard the music of a bugle, and wished she were a Zouave safe in barracks. She wished she were a German-Swiss porter, a merry chasseur—anything but Mrs. Eustace Greyne. One thing alone supported her in this hour of trial, the thought of her husband's ecstasy when she appeared upon the dread scene of his awful labours, to tell him that he was released, that he need visit them no more.

The alley of the Dead Dervishes is long and winding. To Mrs. Greyne it seemed endless. As she threaded it with faltering step, gripped by the feverish hand of Abdallah Jack, who now began to display a strange and terrible excitement, she became a centre of curiosity. Unwashed Arabs, rakish Zouaves in blue and red, wandering Jews of various nationalities, unveiled dancing-girls covered with jewels, stared in wonder upon the chocolate brocade and the floating bonnet strings, followed upon her footsteps, pointing with painted fingers, and making remarks of a personal nature in French, Arabic, and other unknown tongues. She moved in the midst of a crowd, on and on before lighted interiors from which wild music flowed.

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“Shall we never be there?” she panted to Abdallah Jack. “My limbs refuse their office.” She jogged against a Tunisian Jewess in a pointed hat, and rebounded upon an enormous Riff in a tattered sheep-skin. “I can go no farther.”

“We are there! Behold the house of the Ouled!”

As he uttered the last word he burst into a bitter laugh, and drew Mrs. Greyne, now gasping for breath, through an open doorway into a little hall of imitation marble, with fluted pillars adorned with oilcloth, and walls hung with imported oleographs. From a chamber on the right, near a winding staircase covered with blue-and-white tiles, came the sound of laughter, of song, and of a hideous music conveyed to the astonished ear by pipes and drums.

“They are in there!” exclaimed Abdallah Jack, folding his arms, and looking at Mrs. Greyne. “Go to your husband!”

Mrs. Greyne put her hands to her magnificent forehead, and tottered forward. She reached the door, she pushed it, she entered. There upon a wooden dais, surrounded by gilt mirrors and artificial roses, she beheld her husband, in a check suit and a white Homburg hat, performing the wildest evolutions, while opposite him a lady, smothered in coloured silks and coins, tattooed and painted, dyed and scented, covered with kohl and crowned with

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ostrich feathers, screamed a nasal chant of the East, and bounded like an electrified monkey.

"Eustace!" cried Mrs. Greyne, leaning for support against an oleograph.

Her husband turned.

"Eustace!" she cried again. "It is I!"

He stood as if turned to stone. Mrs. Greyne hesitated, started, moved forward to the dais, and stared upon the Ouled, who had also ceased from dancing, and looked strangely surprised, even confused, by the great novelist's intrusion.

"Miss Verbèna!" she exclaimed. "Miss Verbèna in Algiers!"

"Eugenia!" said Mr. Greyne in a husky voice, "what is this you say? This lady is the Ouled."

A sardonic laugh came from the doorway. They turned. There stood Abdallah Jack. He advanced roughly to the Ouled.

"Come," he said angrily. "Have we not earned the money of the stranger? Have we not earned enough? To-morrow you shall marry me as you have promised, and we will return to our own land, to the canal where you and I were born. And nevermore shall the Levantine instruct the babes of the English devils, but dwell veiled and guarded in the harem of her master."

"Mademoiselle Verbèna!" said Mr. Greyne in a more husky voice. "But—but—your dying mother?"

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“ She sleeps, monsieur, in the white sands of Ismailia, beside the bitter lake. I trust that madame can now go on with the respectable ‘ Catherine.’ ”

And with an ironic reverence to Mrs. Eustace Greyne she placed her hand in Abdallah Jack’s and vanished from the room.

“ Catherine’s Repentance,” published in a gigantic volume not many weeks ago, was preceded by Mr. Eustace Greyne’s. When last heard of he was seated in the magnificent library of the corner house in Park Lane next to the Duke of Ebury’s, busily engaged in pasting the newspaper notices of Mrs. Greyne’s greatest work into a superb new album.

The Abdallah Jacks have returned to the Suez Canal, bearing with them a snug little fortune to be invested in the purchase of a coal wharf at Port Said, and a remarkably handsome crocodile dressing-case, fitted with gold, and monogrammed with the initials “ E. G.”

DESERT AIR

I

ON an evening of last summer I was dining in London at the Carlton with two men. One of them was an excellent type of young England, strong, healthy, athletic, and straightforward. The other was a clever London doctor who was building up a great practice in the West End. At dessert the conversation turned upon a then recent tragedy in which a great reputation had gone down, and young England spoke rather contemptuously of the victim, with the superior surprise human beings generally express about the sin which does not happen to be theirs.

"I can't understand it!" was his conclusion.
"It's beyond me."

"Climate," said the doctor quietly.

"What?"

"Climate. Air."

Young England looked inexpressively astonished.

"But hang it all!" he exclaimed, "you don't mean to say change of air means change of nature?"

"Not to everyone. Not to you, perhaps. Have you travelled much?"

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“Well, I’ve been to Paris for the Grand Prix, and to Monte——”

“For the gambling. That’s hardly travelling. Now, I’ve studied this subject a little, quietly in Harley Street. I’m no traveller myself, but I have dozens of patients who are. And I’m convinced that the modern facilities for travel, besides giving an infinity of pleasure, bring about innumerable tragedies.”

He turned to me.

“You go abroad a great deal. What do you say?”

“That you’re perfectly right. And I’m prepared to affirm that, in highly-strung, imaginative, or over-worked people change of climate does sometimes actually cause, or seem to cause, change of nature.”

Young England, who was by no means highly-strung or imaginative, looked politely dubious, but the doctor was evidently pleased.

“An ally!” he cried.

He glanced at me for an instant, then added:

“You’ve got a case that proves it, at any rate to you, in your mind.”

“Quite true.”

“Can you give it us?”

“Jove! let’s have it!” exclaimed young England.

“Certainly, if you like,” I said. “I don’t know whether you ever heard of the Marnier affair?”

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Young England shook his head, but the doctor replied at once.

“Three years ago, wasn’t it?”

“Four.”

“And it happened in some remote place in the Sahara Desert?”

“In Beni-Kouidar. I was with Henry Marnier in Beni-Kouidar at the time.”

“Go ahead!” said young England more eagerly.

“Poor Marnier was not an old friend of mine, but an acquaintance whom I had met casually at Beni-Mora, which is known as a health resort.”

“I send patients there sometimes,” said the doctor.

“The railway stops at Beni-Mora. To reach Beni-Kouidar one must go on horse or camel back over between three and four hundred kilometres of desert, sleeping on the way at ‘Travellers’ Houses—Bordjs as they are called there. Beni-Kouidar lies in the midst of immeasurable sands, and the air that blows through its palm gardens, and round its mosque towers, and down its alleys under the arcades, is startling: dry as the finest champagne, almost fiercely pure and fresh, exhilarating—well, too exhilarating for certain people.”

The doctor nodded.

“Champagne goes very quickly to some heads,” he interjected.

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“ Beni-Kouidar has nothing to say to modern civilisation. It is a wild and turbulent city, divided into quarters—the Arab quarter, the Jews’ quarter, the freed negroes’ quarter, and so on—and furthermore, is infested at certain seasons by the Sahara nomads, who camp in filthy tents on the huge sand dunes round about, and sell rugs, burnouses, and Touareg work to the inhabitants, buying in return the dates for which the palms of Beni-Kouidar are celebrated.

“ I wanted to see a real Sahara city to which the Cook’s tourist had not as yet penetrated, and I resolved to ride there from Beni-Mora. When Henry Marnier heard of it he asked if he might accompany me.

“ Marnier was a young man who had recently left Oxford, and who had come out to Beni-Mora only a week before to see his mother, who was going through the sulphur cure. He was what is generally called a ‘serious-minded young man’; intellectual, inclined to grave reading and high thinking, totally devoid of frivolity, a little cold in manner and temperament, one would have sworn; in fact, a type of a very well-known kind of Oxford undergraduate, the kind that takes a good tutorship for a year or so after leaving the University, and then becomes a schoolmaster or a clergyman. Marnier, by the way, intended to take orders.

“ Now, this sort of young man is not pre-

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cisely my sort, and especially not my sort in the Sahara Desert. But I did not want to be rude to Marnier, who was friendly and agreeable, and obviously anxious to increase his already considerable store of knowledge. So I put my inclinations in my pocket, and, with inward reluctance, I agreed.

“ We set off with Safti, my faithful one-eyed Arab guide, and after three long days of riding and talking—as I had feared—Maeterlink and Tolstoy, Henley and Verlaine (this last being utterly ~~condemned~~ by Marnier as a man of weak character and degraded life) we saw the towers of Beni-Kouidar aspiring above the shifting sands, the tufted summits of the thousands of palm-trees, and heard the dull beating of drums and the cries of people borne to us over the spaces of which silence is the steady guardian.

“ We were all pretty tired, but Marnier was especially done up. He had recently been working very hard for the ‘ first ’ with which he had left Oxford, and was not in good condition. We were, therefore, glad enough when we rode through the wide street thronged with natives, turned the corner into the great camel market, and finally dismounted before the door of the one inn, the ‘ Rendezvous des Amis,’ a mean, dusty, one-storey building, on whose dirty white wall was a crude painting of a preposterous harridan in a purple empire gown, pouring wine for a Zouave who was

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evidently afflicted with elephantiasis. Yet, tired as I was, I stepped out into the camel market for a moment before going into the house, emptied my lungs, and slowly filled them.

“‘What air!’ I said to Marnier, who had followed me.

“‘It is extraordinary,’ he answered in his rather dry tenor voice. ‘I should say like the best champagne, if I did not happen to be a teetotaller.’

“ (The market, I must explain, was not at that moment in active operation.)

“After a *bain de siege*—we both longed for total immersion—and some weak tea, in which I mingled a spoonful of rum, we felt better, but we reposed till dinner, and once again Marnier, in his habitually restrained and critical manner, discussed contemporary literature, and what Plato and Aristotle, judging by their writings, would have been likely to think of it. And once again I felt as if I were in the ‘High’ at Oxford, and was almost inclined to wish that Marnier was the rowdy type of undergrad, who ducks people in water troughs and makes bonfires in quads.”

“H’m!” said the doctor gravely. “Better, perhaps, if he had been.”

“Much better,” I answered. “At seven o’clock we ate a rather tough dinner in the small, bare *salle-à-manger*, on the red brick floor of which sand grains were lying. Our

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only companion was a bearded priest in a dirty soutane, the aumônier of Beni-Kouidar, who sat at a little table apart, and greeted our entrance with a polite bow, but did not then speak to us.

“When the meal was ended, however, he joined us as we stood at the inn door looking out into the night. A moon was rising above the palms, and gilding the cupolas of the Bureau Arabe on the far side of the Market Square. A distant noise of tomtoms and African pipes was audible. And all down the hill to our left—for the land rose to where the inn stood—fires gleamed, and we could see half-naked figures passing and repassing them, and others squatting beside, looking like monks in their hooped burnouses.

“‘You are going out, messieurs?’ said the aumônier politely.

“I looked at Marnier.

“‘You’re too done up, I expect?’ I said to him.

“His face was pale, and he certainly had the demeanour of a tired man.

“‘No,’ he answered. ‘I should like to stroll in this wonderful air.’

“I turned to the priest.

“‘Yes, monsieur,’ I said.

“‘I come here to take my meals, but I live at the edge of the town. Perhaps you will permit me to accompany you for a little way.’

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“ ‘We shall be delighted, and we know nothing of Beni-Kouidar.’

“ ‘As we stepped out into the market Marnier paused to light his pipe. But suddenly he threw away the match he had struck.

“ ‘No, it’s a sin to smoke in this air,’ he said.

“ ‘And he drew a deep breath, looking at the round moon.

“ ‘The priest smiled.

“ ‘ ‘I have lived here for four years,’ he said, ‘and cannot resist my cigar. But you are right. The air of Beni-Kouidar is extraordinary. When first I came here it used to mount to my head like wine.’

“ ‘ ‘Bad for you, Marnier!’ I said, laughing.

“ ‘Then I added, to the aumônier:

“ ‘ ‘My friend never drinks wine, and so ought to be peculiarly susceptible to such an influence.’

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II

“OPPOSITE to the aumônier’s dwelling was the great dancing-house of the town, and when we had bade him good-night, and turned to go back to the inn, I rather tentatively suggested to Marnier that, perhaps, it would be interesting to look in there for a moment.

“‘All right,’ he responded, with his most donnish manner. ‘But I expect it will be rather an unwashed crowd.’

“A quantity of native soldiers—the sort that used to be called Turcos—were gathered round the door. We pushed our way through them, and entered. The café was large, with big white pillars and a double row of divans in the middle, and divans rising in tiers all round. On the left was a large doorway, in which gorgeously-dressed painted women, with gold crowns on their heads, were standing, smoking cigarettes, and laughing with the Arabs; and at the end farthest from the street entrance was a raised platform, on which sat three musicians—a wild-looking demon of a man blowing into an instrument with an immense funnel, and two men beating tomtoms. The noise they made was terrific. The piper wore a voluminous burnouse, and as

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the dancers came in in pairs from the big doorway, which led into the court where they all live together, each in her separate little room with her own front door, they threw their door keys into the hood that was attached to it. As soon as they had finished dancing they went to the hood, and rummaged violently for them again. And all the time the piper blew frantically into his instrument, and rocked himself about like a man in a convulsion.

“ We sat on one of the raised divans, with coffee before us on a wooden stool, and Marnier observed it all with a slightly supercilious coldness. The women, who were dressed in different shades of red, and were the most amazing trollops I ever set eyes on, came and went in pairs, fluttered their painted fingers, twittered like startled birds, jumped and twirled, wriggled and revolved, and inclined their greasy foreheads to the impenetrable spectators, who stuck silver coins on to the perspiring flesh. And Marnier sat and gazed at them with the aloofness of one who watches the creatures in puddle water through a microscope. I could scarcely help laughing at him, but I wished him away. For to me there was excitement, there was even a sort of ecstasy, in the utter barbarity of this spectacle, in the moving scarlet figures with their golden crowns and tufts of ostrich plumes, in the serried masses of turbaned and hooded spectators, in the rocking forms of the musicians, in

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the strident and ceaseless uproar that they made.

“And through the doorway where the Turcos—I like the old name—crowded I saw the sand filtering in from the desert, and against the black leaves of a solitary palm-tree, with leaves like giant Fatma hands, I saw the silver disc of the moon.

“‘I vote we go,’ said Marnier’s light tenor voice in my ear. ‘The atmosphere’s awful in here.’

“‘Very well,’ I said.

“I got up; but just then a girl, dressed in midnight purple embroidered with silver, came in from the doorway, and began to dance alone. She was very young—fourteen, I found out afterwards—and, in contrast to the other women, extremely beautiful. There were grace, seduction, mystery, and coquetry in her face and in all her movements. Her long black eyes held fire and dreams. Her fluttering hands seemed beckoning us to the realms of the thousand and one nights. I stood where I had got up, and watched her.

“‘I say, aren’t we going?’ said Marnier’s voice in my ear.

“I cursed the day when I had agreed to take him with me, leaped down to the earth, and struggled towards the door. As we neared it the girl sidled down the room till she was exactly in front of Marnier. Then she danced before him, smiling with her immense eyes,

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which she fixed steadily upon him, and bending forward her pretty head, covered with a cloth of silver handkerchief.

“ ‘ Give her something,’ I said to him, laughing, as he stared back at her grimly.

“ He thrust his hand into his pocket, found a franc, stuck it awkwardly against her oval forehead, and followed me out.

“ When we were in the sandy street he walked a few steps in silence, then stood still, and, to my surprise, stared back at the dancing-house. Then he put his hand to his head.

“ ‘ Is the air having its alcoholic effect?’ I asked in joke.

“ As I spoke a handsome Arab, splendidly dressed in a pale blue robe, red gaiters and boots, and a turban of fine muslin, spangled with gold, passed us slowly, going towards the dancing-house. He cast a glance full of suspicion and malice at Marnier.

“ ‘ What’s up with that fellow?’ I said, startled.

“ The Arab went on, and at that moment the faithful Safti joined us. He never left me long out of his sight in these outlandish places.

“ ‘ That is the Batouch Sidi, the brother of the Caïd of Beni-Kouidar,’ he said. ‘ Algia, the dancer to whom Monsieur Henri has just given money, is his *chère amie*. But as the government has just made him a sheik, he

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dares not have her in his house for fear of the scandal. So he has put her with the dancers. That is why she dances, to deceive everyone, not to make money. She is not as the other dancers. But everyone knows, for Batouch is mad with jealousy. He cannot bear that Algia should dance before strangers, but what can he do? A sheik must not have a scandal in his dwelling.'

"We walked on slowly. When we got to the door of the 'Rendezvous des Amis' Marnier stood still again, and looked down the deserted, moonlit camel market.

" 'I never knew air like this,' he said in a low voice.

"And once more he expelled the air from his lungs, and drew in a long, slow breath, as a man does when he has finished his dumbbell exercise in the morning.

" 'Don't drink too much of it,' I said. 'Remember what the aumônier told us!'

"Marnier looked at me. I thought there was something apprehensive in his eyes. But he said nothing, and we turned in.

"The next day I rode out with Safti into the desert to visit a sacred personage of great note in the Sahara, Sidi El Ahmed Ben Daoud Abderahmann. To my relief Marnier declined to come. He said he was tired, and would stroll about the city. When we got back at sundown the innkeeper handed me a note. I opened it, and found it was from the

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aumônier, saying that he would be greatly obliged if I would call and see him on my return, as he had various little curiosities which he would be glad to show me. Marnier was not in the inn, and, as I had nothing particular to do, I walked at once to the aumônier's house. As I have said, it was the last in the town. The dancing-house was on the opposite side of the way; but the aumônier's dwelling jutted out a little farther into the desert, and looked full on a deep depression of soft sand bounded by a big dune, which loomed up like a couchant beast in the fading yellow light.

"The aumônier met me at his door, and escorted me into a pleasant room, where his collection of Arab weapons, coins, and old vases, cups, and various utensils, dug up, he told me, at Tlemcen, was arranged. But to my surprise he scarcely took time to show it to me before he said:

" 'Though a stranger, may I venture to speak rather intimately to you, monsieur?'

" 'Certainly,' I replied, in some astonishment.

" 'Your friend is young.'

" 'Marnier?'

" 'Is that his name? Well, I would not leave him to stroll about too much alone, if I were you.'

" 'Why, monsieur?'

" 'He is likely to get into trouble. The people here are a wild and violent race. He would

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do well to bear in mind the saying of a traveler who knew the desert men better than most people: "If you want to be friendly with them, and safe among them, give cigarettes to the men, and leave the women alone." I see a good deal, monsieur, owing to the situation of my little house.'

"I looked at him in silence. Then I said:

" 'What have you seen? '

"He led me to the door, and pointed towards the great dune beyond the dancing-house.

"I saw your friend this afternoon talking there with one whom it is especially unsafe to be seen with in Beni-Kouidar.'

" 'With whom? '

" 'A dancer called Algia.'

" 'Talking, monsieur! Marnier knows no Arabic.'

"The aumônier pursed his lips in his black beard.

" 'The conversation appeared to be carried on by signs,' he responded. 'That did not make it less but more dangerous.'

"I'm afraid I was rude, and whistled softly.

" 'Monsieur l'Aumônier,' I said, 'you must forgive me, but this air is certainly the very devil.'

"He smiled, not without irony.

" 'I became aware of that myself, monsieur, when first I came to live in Beni-Kouidar. But I am a priest, and—well, monsieur, I was giv-

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en the strength to say: "Get thee behind me, Satan." "

"A softer look came into his sunburnt, wrinkled face.

" 'Better take your friend away as soon as possible,' he added, 'or there will be trouble.'

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III

“THAT night I found myself confronted by a Marnier whom I had never seen before. The desert wine had gone to the lad’s brain. That was certain. No intonations of the Oxford don lurked in the voice. No reminiscences of the Oxford ‘High’ clung about the manner. A man sober and the same man drunk are scarcely more different than the Marnier who had ridden with me up the sandy street of Beni-Kouidar the previous day and the man who sat opposite to me at dinner in the ‘Rendezvous des Amis’ that night. I knew in a moment that the aumônier was right, and that I must get the lad away at once from the intoxicant which nature poured out over this far-away city. His eyes were shining feverishly, and when I mentioned Mr. Ruskin in a casual way he looked unutterably bored.

“ ‘Ruskin and all those fellows seem awfully slow and out of place here,’ he exclaimed. ‘One doesn’t want to bother about them in the Sahara.’

“ I changed the subject.

“ ‘There doesn’t seem very much to see here,’ I said carelessly. ‘We might get away the day after to-morrow, don’t you think?’

“ He drew his brows down.

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“ ‘The horses won’t be sufficiently rested,’ he said curtly.

“ ‘Oh yes; I fancy they will.’

“ ‘Well, I don’t fancy I shall. The long ride took it out of me.’

“ ‘Turn in to-night, then, directly after dinner.’

“ He looked at me with sharp suspicion. I met his gaze blandly.

“ ‘I mean to,’ he said after a short pause.

“ I knew he was telling me a lie, but I only said: ‘That’s right!’ and resolved to keep an eye on him.

“ Directly dinner was over he sprang up from the table.

“ ‘Good-night,’ he said.

“ And before I could reply he was out of the *salle-à-manger*, and I heard him tramp along the brick floor of the passage, go into his room, and bang the door.

“ The aumônier was getting up from his little table, and shaking the crumbs from his soutane.

“ ‘You are quite right, monsieur,’ I said to him. ‘I must get my friend away.’

“ ‘I shall be sorry to lose you,’ replied the good priest. ‘But—desert air, desert air!’

“ He shook his head, half wistfully, half laughingly, bowed, put on his broad-brimmed black hat, and went out.

“ After a moment I followed him. I stood in the doorway of the inn, and lit a cigar. I

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knew Marnier was not going to bed, and meant to catch him when he came out, and join him. In common politeness he could scarcely refuse my company, since he had asked me as a favour to let him come with me to Beni-Kouidar. I waited, watching the moon rise, till my cigar was smoked out. Then I lit another. Still he did not come. I heard the distant throb of tomtoms beyond the Bureau Arabe in the quarter of the freed negroes. They were having a fantasia. I began to think that I must have been mistaken, and that Marnier had really turned in. So much the better. The ash dropped from the stump of my second cigar, and the deserted camel market was flooded with silver from the moon-rays. I knew there was only one door to the inn. Slowly I lit a third cigar.

“A large cloud went over the face of the moon. A gust of wind struck my face. Suddenly the night had changed. The moon looked forth again, and was again obscured. A second gust struck me like a blow, and my face was stung by a multitude of sand grains. I heard steps behind me in the brick passage, turned swiftly, and saw the landlord.

“‘I must shut the door, m’sieu,’ he said. ‘There’s a bad sandstorm coming up.’

“As he spoke the wind roared, and over the camel market a thick fog seemed to fall abruptly. It was a sheet of sand from the surrounding dunes. I threw away my cigar,

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stepped into the passage, and the landlord banged the door, and drove home the heavy bolts.

“Then I went to Marnier’s room, and knocked. I felt sure, but I thought I would make sure before going to my room.

“No answer.

“I knocked again loudly.

“Again no answer.

“Then I turned the handle, and entered.

“The room was empty. I glanced round quickly. The small window was open. All the windows of the inn were barred, but, as I learned later, a bar in Marnier’s had been broken, and was not yet replaced when we arrived at Beni-Kouidar. In consequence of this it was possible to squeeze through into the arcade outside. This was what Marnier had done. My precise, gentlemanly, reserved, and methodical acquaintance had deliberately given me the slip by sneaking out of a window like a schoolboy, and creeping round the edge of the inn to the *fosse* that lay in the shadow of the sand dunes. As I realised this I realised his danger.

“I ran to my room, fetched my revolver, slipped it into my pocket, and hurried to the front door. The landlord heard me trying to undo the bolts, and came out protesting.

“‘M’sieu cannot go out into the storm.’

“‘I must.’

“‘But m’sieu does not know what Beni-

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Kouidar is like when the sand is blown on the wind. It is *enfer*. Besides, it is not safe. In the darkness m'sieu may receive a *mauvais coup*.'

" 'Make haste, please, and open the door. I am going to fetch my friend.'

" He pulled the bolts, grumbling and swearing, and I went out into *enfer*. For he was right. A sandstorm at night in Beni-Kouidar is hell.

" Luckily, Safti joined me mysteriously from the deuce knows where, and we staggered to the dancing-house somehow, and struggled in, blinded, our faces scored, our clothes heavy with sand, our pockets, our very boots, weighed down with it.

" The tomtoms were roaring, the pipe was yelling, blown by the frantic demon with his hood full of latch keys, the impassible, bearded faces were watching the painted women who, in their red garments and their golden crowns, promenaded down the earthen floor, between the divans, fluttering their dyed fingers, smiling grotesquely like idols, bending forward their greasy foreheads to receive the tribute of their admirers.

" I ran my eyes swiftly over the mob. Marnier was not in it. I pushed my way towards the doorway on the left which gave on to the court of the dancers.

" Safti caught hold of my arm.

" 'It is not safe to go in there on such a

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night, Sidi. There are no lamps. It is black as a tomb. And no one can tell who may be there. Nomads, perhaps, men of evil from the south. Many murders have been done in the court on black nights, and no one can say who has done them. For all the time men go in and out to the rooms of the dancers.'

" ' Nevertheless, Safti, I must——'

" I stopped speaking, for at this moment Batouch, the brother of the Caïd of Beni-Kouidar, came slowly in through the doorway from the blackness of the sand-swept court. There was a strange smile on his handsome face, and he was caressing his black beard gently with one delicate hand. He saw me, smiled more till I caught the gleam of his white teeth, passed on into the dancing-house, sat down on a divan, and called for coffee. I could not take my eyes from him. Every movement he made fascinated me. He drew from his pale blue robe a silver box, opened it, lifted out a pinch of tobacco, and began carefully to roll a cigarette. And all the time he smiled.

" A glacial cold crept over my body. As he lit his cigarette I caught hold of Safti, and hurried through the doorway into the blackness of the whirling sand."

.

Here I stopped.

" Well? " said young England. " Well? " The doctor did not speak.

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“ Well,” I answered. “ Algia danced that night. While she was dancing we found a dead body in the court. It was Marnier’s. A knife had been thrust into him from behind! ”

“ Ah! ” said the doctor.

“ But—” exclaimed young England, “ it was that fellow? It was Batouch? ”

I shrugged my shoulders.

“ Nobody ever found out who did it.”

“ Well, but of course——”

He checked himself, and an expression of admiration dawned slowly over his healthy, handsome face.

“ I say,” he said, “ to be able to roll a cigarette directly afterwards! What infernal cheek! ”

“ Desert air! ” I replied. “ My dear chap—desert air! ”

The doctor nodded.

“*FIN TIREUR*”

TWO years ago I was travelling by diligence in the Sahara Desert on the great caravan route, which starts from Beni-Mora and ends, they say, at Tombouctou. For fourteen hours each day we were on the road, and each evening about nine o'clock we stopped at a Bordj, or Travellers' House, ate a hasty meal, threw ourselves down on our gaudy Arab rugs, and slept heavily till the hour before dawn, drugged by fatigue and by the strong air of the desert. In the late afternoon of the third day of our journeying we drove into a sand-storm. A great wind arose, carrying with it innumerable multitudes of sand grains, which whirled about the diligence and the struggling horses, blotting out the desert as completely as a London fog blots out the street on a November day. The cold became intense, and very soon I began to long for the next halting-place.

“Where do we stop to-night?” I shouted to the French driver, who, with his yellow toque pulled down over his ears, was chirping encouragement to his horses.

“Sidi-Hamdane,” he answered, without turning his head. “At the inn of ‘Fin Tireur.’”

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Three hours later we drew up before a low building, from which a light shone kindly, and I scrambled down stiffly, and lurched into the longed-for shelter.

There was a man in the doorway, a short, sturdy, middle-aged Frenchman, with strong features, a tuft of grey beard, heavy eyebrows, and dark, prominent eyes, with a hot, shining look in them.

“*Bon soir*, m’sieu,” he said.

“*Bon soir*,” I answered.

This was my host, the innkeeper whom the driver had called “Fin Tireur.”

I found out afterwards that he was not only landlord of the desolate inn, but cook, garcon; in fact, the whole personnel. He lived there absolutely alone, and was the only European in this Arab village lost in the great spaces of the Sahara. This information I drew from him while he waited upon me at dinner, which I ate in solitude. My companions of the diligence were Arabs, who had melted away like ghosts into the desolation so soon as the diligence had rolled into the paved courtyard round which the one-storied house was built.

When I had finished dinner I lit a cigar. I was now quite alone in the bare *salle-à-manger*. The storm was at its height; the sand was driven like hail against the wooden shutters of the windows, and I felt dreary enough. The French driver was no doubt supping in the

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kitchen with the landlord, perhaps beside a fire. I began to long for company, for warmth, and I resolved to join them. I opened the door, therefore, and peered out into the passage. There was no sound of voices; but I saw a light at a little distance, went towards it, and found myself in a small kitchen, where the landlord was sitting alone by a red wood fire in the midst of his pots and pans, smoking a thin black cigar, and reading a dirty number of the *Journal Anti-Juif* of Algiers. He put it down politely as I came in.

“You’re alone, monsieur,” I said.

“Yes, m’sieu. The driver has gone to see to the horses.”

I offered him one of my Havanas, which he accepted with alacrity, and drew up with him before the fire.

“You have been living here long, monsieur?”

“Twenty years, m’sieu.”

“Twenty years alone in this desert place!”

“Nineteen years alone, m’sieu. Before that I had my little Marie.”

“Marie?”

“My child, m’sieu. She is buried in the sand behind the inn.”

I looked at him in silence. His brown, wrinkled face was calm, but in his prominent eyes there was still the hot shining look I had observed in them when I arrived.

“FIN TIREUR”

“The palms begin there,” he added. “Year by year I have saved what I could, and now I have bought all the palm-trees near where she lies.”

He puffed away at his Havana.

“You come from France?” I asked presently.

“From the Midi—I was born at Cassis, near Marseille.”

“Don’t you ever intend to go back there?”

“Never, m’sieu. Would you have me desert my child?”

“But,” I said gently, “she is dead.”

“Yes; but I have promised her that her *bon papa* will lie with her presently for company. Leave her alone with the Arabs!”

A sudden look of horror came into his face.

“You don’t like the Arabs?”

“Like the dirty dogs! You haven’t been told about me, m’sieu?”

“Only that your name was ‘Fin Tireur.’”

“‘Fin Tireur.’ Yes; that’s what they call me in the desert.”

“You’re a sportsman? A ‘capital shot’?”

He laughed suddenly, and his laugh made me feel cold.

“Oh! they don’t call me ‘Fin Tireur’ because I can hit gazelle, and bring them home for supper. No, no! Shall I tell you why?”

He looked at me half defiantly, half wistfully, I thought.

“But if I do, perhaps your stomach will

“FIN TIREUR ”

turn against the food I cooked with these hands,” he added suddenly, stretching out his hands towards me. “You are English, m’sieu?”

“Yes.”

“Then I daresay you won’t understand.”

“I think I shall,” I answered, looking full at him.

The way he had spoken of his child had drawn me to him. Whatever he had done, I felt that chivalry and tenderness were in this man.

“Why do they call you ‘Fin Tireur’?”

“The men of the Midi, m’sieu, are not like the men of the rest of France,” said Fin Tireur—“at least so they say. We are boasters, perhaps; but we’ve got more love of adventure, more wish to see the world, and do something big in it. They’re talkers, you know, in the Midi, and they tell of what they’ve done. I heard them at Cassis when I was a boy, and one day I saw a Zouave in front of the inn balcony, where folks come on fête days to eat the bouillabaisse. The talk I had heard made me wish to rove; but when I saw the Zouave, in his big red trousers and blue and red jacket, I said to myself: ‘As soon as my three years’ service is over I’ll go to Africa, and make my fortune.’ I did my three years at Grenoble, m’sieu, and when it was done I carried out my resolve. I came to Africa; but I didn’t come alone.”

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He puffed at his cigar for a minute or two, and the hot look in his eyes became more definite, like a fanned flame.

“You took a comrade?”

“I took a wife, a girl of Cassis. A good girl she was then.”

He paused again, then continued, in rather a loud voice: “She was good, m’sieu, because she had seen nothing. That’s often the way. It was I who put it into her head that there were things to be seen better than rocks, and dead white dusty roads, and fishing boats against the quay. I’ve thought of that since I—since I got my name of Fin Tireur. Her name was Marie, and she was eighteen when we stood before the priest. Next day we went to Marseille, and took the boat for Algiers. Our heads were full of I don’t know what. We thought we were clever ones, and should do well in a country like Africa. And so we did at first. We got into a hotel at Algiers. She was housemaid, and I was porter in the hall, and what with the goings and comings—strangers giving us a little when we’d done our best for them—we made some money, and we saved it. And I wish to God we’d spent it, every sou!”

His voice became fierce for a moment. Then he continued, with an obvious effort to be calm: “You see, m’sieu, at Algiers we had nothing to say to the Arabs. With the money we’d saved we left Algiers, and came into the

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desert to take a café which was to let near the station at Beni-Mora.”

“I’ve just come from there.”

“They call it ‘Au Retour du Sahara.’ ”

“I’ve had coffee there.”

“That was ours, and there little Marie was born. In those days there weren’t many strangers in Beni-Mora. The railway had only just come there, and it was wild enough. Very few, except the Arabs. Well, they were often our customers. We learned to talk a bit of their language, and they a bit of ours; and, having no friends out there, I might say we made sort of friends with some of them. The dirty dogs! The camels!”

He struck his clenched hand down on the table. As he talked he had lost his former consciousness of my close observation.

“But they know how to please women, m’sieu.”

“They are often very handsome,” I said.

“It isn’t only that. They can stare a woman down as a wild beast can, and that’s what women like. I never so much as looked on them as men—not in that way, for a Cassis woman, m’sieu. But Marie——”

He choked, ground his teeth on his cigar stump, let it drop, and stamped out the glowing end on the brick floor with his heel.

“She served them, m’sieu,” he resumed, after clearing his throat. “But I was mostly there, and I don’t see how—but women can al-

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ways find the way. Well, one day she went to what they call a sand-diviner. She didn't pretend anything. She told me she wanted to go, and I was ready. I was always ready that she should have any little pleasure. I couldn't leave the café, so she went off alone to a room he had by the Garden of the Gazelles, at the end of the dancing-street.”

“I know—over the place where they smoke the kief.”

“She didn't answer, but went and sat down under the arbour, opposite to where they wash the clothes. I followed her, for she looked ill.

“‘Did he read in the sand for you?’ I said.

“‘Yes,’ she said; ‘he did.’

“‘What things did he read?’

“She turned, and looked right at me. ‘That my fate lies in the sand,’ she said—‘and yours, and hers.’

“And she pointed at little Marie, who was playing with a yellow kid we had then just by the door.

“‘What's that to be afraid of?’ I asked her. ‘Haven't we come to the desert to make our fortune, and isn't there sand in the desert?’

“‘Not much by here,’ she said.

“And that's true, m'sieu. It's hard ground, you know, at Beni-Mora.”

“Yes,” I said, offering him another cigar. He refused it with a quick gesture.

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“ She never would say another word as to what the sand-diviner had told her; but she was never the same from that day. She was as uneasy as a lost bitch, m’sieu; and she made me uneasy too. Sometimes she wouldn’t speak to our little one when the child ran to her, and sometimes she’d catch her up, and kiss her till the little one’s cheek was as red as if you’d been striking it. And then one day, after dark, she went.”

“ Went! ”

“ I’d been ill with fever, and gone to spend the night at the sulphur baths; you know, m’sieu, Hammam-Salahkin, under the mountains. I came back just at dawn to open the café. When I got off my mule at the door I heard ”—his face twitched convulsively—“ the most horrible crying of a child. It was so horrible that I just stood there, holding on to the bridle of the mule, and listening, and didn’t dare go in. I’d heard children cry often enough before; but—*mon Dieu!*—never like that. At last I dropped the bridle, and went in, with my legs shaking under me. I found the little one alone in the house, and like a mad thing. She’d been alone all night.”

His face set rigidly.

“ And her mother knew I should be all night at the Hammam,” he said. “ Fin Tireur—yes, it was coming back, and finding my little one left like that in such a place, made me earn the name.”

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He fell suddenly into a moody silence. I broke it by saying: “It was the sand-diviner?”

He looked at me sharply. “I don’t know.”

“You never found out?”

“At Beni-Mora the women go veiled,” he said harshly.

Suddenly I realised the horror of the situation: the deserted husband living on with his child in the midst of the ordained and close secrecy of Beni-Mora, where many of the women never set foot out of doors, and those who do, unless they are the public dancers, are so heavily veiled that their features cannot be recognised.

“What did you do?” I asked.

“I searched, as far as one can search in an Arab town, and found out nothing. I wanted to tear the veil from every woman in the place; and then I was sent away from Beni-Mora.”

“By whom?”

“The French authorities, my own countrymen,” he laughed bitterly. “To save me from getting myself murdered, m’sieu.”

“You would have been.”

“Why not? Then I came here to keep the inn for the diligence that carries the mails to the south, for I wouldn’t leave the country till——”

He paused.

“And the sand-diviner?”

“I left him at Beni-Mora. He smiled, and

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said he knew no more than I; and perhaps he didn't. How was I to tell? ”

“ But your name of Fin Tireur? ”

“ Ah! ”—the thing in his eyes glowed like a thing red-hot—“ I'd been here eleven months when, one afternoon of summer, just near sunset, I heard a noise of drums beating and African pipes screaming, and the snarl of camels on the road you came to-night. I was in the house, in this room where we are sitting now, and little Marie was playing just outside by the well, so that I could see her through the window. By the sounds, I knew a great caravan was coming up, and passing towards the south. They always water at the well, and I stood by the window to see them. Little Marie stood too, shading her eyes with her bit of a hand. The drums and pipes got louder, and round the corner of the inn came as big a caravan as I've ever seen; near a hundred camels, horsemen, and led mules and donkeys, Kabyle dogs and goats, the music playing all the time, and a Caïd's flag flying in the front. They made for the well, as I knew they would, and little Marie stood all the while watching them. M'sieu, there were square packs on some of the camels, and veiled women on the packs.”

He looked across at me hard.

“ Veiled women? ” I repeated.

“ When they got to the well they made the camels kneel for the women to get down; and one of the women, when she was down, caught

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sight of Marie standing there, with her little hand shading her eyes. That woman gave a great cry behind her veil. I heard it, m'sieu, as I stood by the window there, and I saw the woman run at the little one.”

He got up from his seat slowly, and stood by the wooden shutter, against which the sand was driven by the wind.

“In a place like this, m'sieu, one keeps a revolver here.”

He put his hand to a pocket at the back of his breeches, brought out a revolver, and pointed it at the shutter.

“When I heard the woman cry I took my revolver out. When I saw the woman run I fired, and the bullet struck the veil.”

He put the revolver back into his pocket, and sat down again quietly.

“And that's why they call me Fin Tireur.”

I said nothing, and sat staring at him.

“When the camels had been watered the caravan went on.”

“But—but the Arabs——”

“The Caïd had the body tied across a donkey—they told me.”

“You didn't see?”

“No. I took the little one in. She was screaming, and I had to see to her. It was two days afterwards, when I was at the market, that a scorpion stung her. She was dead when I came back. Well, m'sieu, are you sorry you ate your supper?”

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Before I could reply, the door opening into the courtyard gaped, and the driver entered, followed by a cloud of whirling sand grains.

“*Nom d'un chien!*” he exclaimed. “Get me a tumbler of wine, for the love of God, Fin Tireur. My throat's full of the sand. *Sacré nom d'un nom d'un nom!*”

He pulled off his coat, turned it upside down, and shook the sand out of the pockets, while Fin Tireur went over to the corner of the kitchen where the bottles stood in a row against the earthen wall.

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IN travelling about the world one collects a number of those trifles of all sorts, usually named "curiosities," many of them worthless if it were not for the memories they recall. The other day I was clearing out a bureau before going abroad, and in one of the drawers I came across a hedgehog's foot, set in silver, and hung upon a tarnished silver chain. I picked it up in the Sahara, and here is its history.

.

Mohammed El Aïd Ben Ali Tidjani, marabout of Tamacine, is a great man in the Sahara Desert. His reputation for piety reaches as far as Tunis and Algiers, to the north of Africa, and to the uttermost parts of the Southern Desert, even to the land of the Touaregs. He dwells in a sacred village of dried mud and brick, surrounded by a high wall, pierced with loopholes, and ornamented with gates made of palm wood, and covered with sheets of iron. In his mansion, above the entrance of which is written "L'Entrée de Sidi Laïd," are clocks innumerable, musical boxes, tables, chairs, sofas, and even framed photographs. Negro servants bow before him,

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wives, brothers, children, and obsequious hangers-on of various nationalities, black, bronze, and *café au lait* in colour, offer him perpetual incense. Rich worshippers of the Prophet and the Prophet's priests send him presents from afar; camels laden with barley, donkeys staggering beneath sacks of grain, ostrich plumes, silver ornaments, perfumes, red-eyed doves, gazelles whose tiny hoofs are decorated with gold-leaf or painted in bright colours. The tributes laid before the tomb of Cheikh Sidi El Hadj Ali ben Sidi El Hadj Aïssa are, doubtless, his perquisites as guardian of the saint. He dresses in silks of the tints of the autumn leaf, and carries in his mighty hand a staff hung with apple-green ribbons. And his smile is as the smile of the rising sun in an oleograph.

This personage one day blessed the hedgehog's foot I at present possess, and endowed it solemnly with miraculous curative properties. It would cure, he declared, all the physical ills that can beset a woman. Then he gave it into the hands of a great Agha, who was about to take a wife, accepted a tribute of dates, a grandfather's clock from Paris, and a grinding organ of Barbary as a small acknowledgment of his generosity, and probably thought very little more about the matter.

Now, in the course of time, it happened that the hedgehog's foot came into the possession of a dancing-girl of Touggourt, called Hali-

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ma. How Halima got hold of it I cannot say, nor does anyone in Touggourt exactly know, so far as I am aware. But, alas! even Aghas are sometimes human, and play pitch and toss with magical things. As Grand Dukes who go to disport themselves in Paris sometimes hie them incognito to the "Café de la Sorcière," so do Aghas flit occasionally to Touggourt, and appear upon the high benches of the great dancing-house of the Ouled Nails in the outskirts of the city. And Halima was young and beautiful. Her eyes were large, and she wore a golden crown ornamented with very tall feathers. And she danced the dance of the hands and the dance of the fainting fit with great perfection. And the wives of Aghas have to put up with a good deal. However it was, one evening Halima danced with the hedgehog's foot that had been blessed dangling from her jewelled girdle. And there was a great scandal in the city.

For in the four quarters of Touggourt, the quarter of the Jews, of the foreigners, of the freed negroes, and of the citizens proper, it was known that the hedgehog's foot had been blessed and endowed with magical powers by the mighty marabout of Tamacine.

Halima herself affirmed it, standing at the front door of her terraced dwelling in the court, while the other dancers gathered round, looking like a troop of macaws in their feathers and their finery. With a brazen pride

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she boasted that she possessed something worth more than uncut rubies, carpets from Bagdad, and silken petticoats sewn with sequins. And the Ouled Nails could not gainsay her. Indeed, they turned their huge, kohl-tinted eyes upon the relic with envy, and stretched their painted hands towards it as if to a god in prayer. But Halima would let no one touch it, and presently, taking from her bosom her immense door key, she retired to enshrine the foot in her box, studded with huge brass nails, such as stands by each dancer's bed.

And the scandal was very great in the city that such a precious thing should be between the hands of an Ouled Nail, a girl of no repute, come thither in a palanquin on camel-back to earn her dowry, and who would depart into the sands of the south, laden with the gold wrung from the pockets of loose livers.

Only Ben-Abid smiled gently when he heard of the matter.

Ben-Abid belonged to the *Tribu des blancs*, and was the singer attached to the café of the smokers of the hashish. He it was who struck each evening a guitar made of goatskin backed by sand tortoise, and lifted up his voice in the song "Lalia":

"Ladham Pacha who has left the heart of his enemies
trembling—

O Lalia! O Lalia!

The love of women is no more sweet to me after thy love.

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Thy hand is white, and thy bracelets are of the purest silver—

And I, Ladham Pacha, love thee, without thought of what will come.

O Lalia! O Lalia!”

The assembled smokers breathed out under the black ceiling their deep refrain of “Wurra-Wurra!” and Larbi, in his Zouave jacket and his tight, pleated skirt, threw back his small head, exposing his long brown throat, and danced like a tired phantom in a dream.

Ben-Abid smiled, showing two rows of lustrous teeth.

“Should Halima fall ill, the foot will not avail to cure her,” he murmured. “Ben Ali Tidjani’s blessing could never rest on an Ouled Nail, who, like a little viper of the sand, has stolen into the Agha’s bosom, and filled his veins with subtle poison. She deems she has a treasure; but let her beware: that which would protect a woman who wears the veil will do naught for a creature who shows her face to the stranger, and dances by night for the Zouaves and for the Spahis who patrol the dunes.”

And he struck his long fingers upon the goatskin of his instrument, while Kouïdah, the boy who played upon the little glasses and shook the tambourine of reeds, slipped forth to tell in the city what Ben-Abid had spoken.

Halima was enraged when she heard of it,

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more especially as there were found many to believe Ben-Abid's words. She stood before her room upon the terrace, where Zouaves were playing cards with the dancers in the sun, and she cursed him in a shrill voice, calling him son of a scorpion, and requesting that Allah would send great troubles upon his relations, even upon his aged grandmother. That the miraculous reputation of her treasure should be thus scouted, and herself insulted, vexed her to the soul.

"Let the son of a camel with a swollen tongue dare to come to me and repeat what he has said!" she cried. "Let him come out from his lair in the café of the hashish smokers, and, as Allah is great, I will spit in his face. The reviler of women! The son of a scorpion! Cursed be his——"

And then once more she desired evil to the grandmother of Ben-Abid, and to all his family. And the Zouaves and the dancers laughed over their card games. Indeed, the other dancers were merry, and not ill-pleased with Ben-Abid's words. For even in the Sahara the women do not care that one of them should be exalted above the rest.

Now, in Touggourt gossip is carried from house to house, as the sand grains are carried on the wind. Within an hour Ben-Abid heard that his grandmother had been cursed, and himself called son of a scorpion, by Halima. Kouïdah, the boy, ran on naked feet to tell

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him in the café of the hashish smokers. When he heard he smiled.

“To-night I will go to the dancing-house, and speak with Halima,” he murmured. And then he plucked the guitar of goatskin that was ever in his hands, and sang softly of the joys of Ladham Pacha, half closing his eyes, and swaying his head from side to side.

And Kouïdah, the boy, ran back across the camel market to tell in the court of the dancers the words of Ben-Abid.

That night, when the nomads lit their brush-wood fires in the market; when the Kabyle bakers, in their striped turbans and their close-fitting jerseys of yellow and of red, ran to and fro bearing the trays of flat, new-made loaves; when the dwarfs beat on the ground with their staffs to summon the mob to watch their antics; and the story-tellers put on their glasses, and sat them down at their boards between the candles; Ben-Abid went forth secretly from the hashish café wrapped in his burnous. He sought out in the quarter of the freed negroes a certain man called Sadok, who dwelt alone.

This Sadok was lean as a spectre, and had a skin like parchment. He was a renowned plunger in desert wells, and could remain beneath the water, men said, for a space of four minutes. But he could also do another thing. He could eat scorpions. And this he would do for a small sum of money. Only, during the

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fast of Ramadan, between the rising and the going down of the sun, so long as a white thread could be distinguished from a black, he would not eat even a scorpion, because the tasting of food by day in that time is forbidden by the Prophet.

When Ben-Abid struck on his door Sadok came forth, gibbering in his tangled beard, and half naked.

"Oh, brother!" said Ben-Abid. "Here is money if thou canst find me three scorpions. One of them must be a black scorpion."

Sadok shot out his filthy claw, and there was fire in his eyes. But Ben-Abid's fingers closed round the money paper.

"First thou must find the scorpions, and then thou must carry them with thee to the court of the dancers, walking at my side. For, as Allah lives, I will not touch them. Afterwards thou shalt have the money."

Sadok's soul drew the shutters across his eyes. Then he led the way by tortuous alleys to an old and ruined wall of a *zgag*, in which there were as many holes as there are in a honeycomb. Here, as he knew, the scorpions loved to sleep. Thrusting his fingers here and there he presently drew forth three writhing reptiles. And one of them was black. He held them out, with a cry, to Ben-Abid.

"The money! The money!" he shrieked. But Ben-Abid shrank back, shuddering.

"Thou must bring them to the dancers'

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court. Hide them well in thy garments that none may see them. Then thou shalt have the money."

Sadok hid the scorpions upon his shaven head beneath his turban, and they went by the dunes and the lonely ways to the café of the dancers.

Already the pipers were playing, and many were assembled to see the women dance; but Ben-Abid and Sadok pushed through the throng, and passed across the café to the inner court, which is open to the air, and surrounded with earthen terraces on which, in tiers, open the rooms of the dancers, each with its own front door. This court is as a mighty rabbit warren, peopled with women instead of rabbits. Pale lights gleamed in many doorways, for the dancers were dressing and painting themselves for the dances of the body, of the hands, of the poignard, and of the handkerchief. Their shrill voices cried one to another, their heavy bracelets and necklets jingled, and the monstrous shadows of their crowned and feathered heads leaped and wavered on the yellow patches of light that lay before their doors.

"Where is Halima?" cried Ben-Abid in a loud voice. "Let Halima come forth and spit in my face!"

At the sound of his call many women ran to their doors, some half dressed, some fully attired, like Jezebels of the great desert.

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“It is Ben-Abid!” went up the cry of many voices. “It is Ben-Abid, who laughs to scorn the power of the hedgehog’s foot. It is the son of the camel with the swollen tongue. Halima, Halima, the child of the scorpion calls thee!”

Kouïdah, the boy, who was ever about, ran barefoot from the court into the café to tell of the doings of Ben-Abid, and in a moment the people crowded in, Zouaves and Spahis, Arabs and negroes, nomads from the south, gipsies, jugglers, and Jews. There were, too, some from Tamacine, and these were of all the most intent.

“Where is Halima?” went up the cry. “Where is Halima?”

“Who calls me?” exclaimed the voice of a girl.

And Halima came out of her door on the first terrace at the left, splendidly dressed for the dance in scarlet and gold, carrying two scarlet handkerchiefs in her hands, and with the hedgehog’s foot dangling from her girdle of thin gold, studded with turquoises.

Ben-Abid stood below in the court with Sadok by his side. The crowd pressed about him from behind.

“Thou hast called me the son of a scorpion, Halima,” he said, in a loud voice. “Is it not true?”

“It is true,” she answered, with a venomous smile of hatred. “And thou hast said that

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the hedgehog's foot, blessed by the great marabout of Tamacine, would avail naught against the deadly sickness of a dancing-girl. Is it not true?"

"It is true," answered Ben-Abid.

"Thou art a liar!" cried Halima.

"And so art thou!" said Ben-Abid slowly.

A deep murmur rose from the crowd, which pressed more closely beneath the terrace, staring up at the scarlet figure upon it.

"If I am a liar thou canst not prove it!" cried Halima furiously. "I spit upon thee! I spit upon thee!"

And she bent down her feathered head from the terrace and spat passionately in his face.

Ben-Abid only laughed aloud.

"I can prove that I have spoken the truth," he said. "But if I am indeed the son of a scorpion, as thou sayest, let my brothers speak for me. Let my brothers declare to all the Sahara that the truth is in my mouth. Sadok, remove thy turban!"

The plunger of the wells, with a frantic gesture, lifted his turban and discovered the three scorpions writhing upon his shaven head. Another, and longer, murmur went up from the crowd. But some shrank back and trembled, for the desert Arabs are much afraid of scorpions, which cause many deaths in the Sahara.

"What is this?" cried Halima. "How can the scorpions speak for thee?"

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"They shall speak well," said Ben-Abid. "Their voices cannot lie. Sleep to-night in thy room with these my brothers. Irena and Boria, the Golden Date and the Lotus Flower, shall watch beside thee. Guard in thy hand, or in thy breast, the hedgehog's foot that thou sayest can preserve from every ill. If, in the evening of to-morrow, thou dancest before the soldiers, I will give thee fifty golden coins. But, if thou dancest not, the city shall know whether Ben-Abid is a truth-teller, and whether the blessings of the great marabout can rest upon such a woman as thou art. If thou refusest thou art afraid, and thy fear proveth that thou hast no faith in the magic treasure that dangles at thy girdle."

There was a moment of deep silence. Then, from the crowd burst forth the cry of many voices:

"Put it to the proof! Ben-Abid speaks well. Put it to the proof, and may Allah judge between them."

Beneath the caked pigments on her face Halima had gone pale.

"I will not," she began.

But the cries rose up again, and with them the shrill, twittering laughter of her envious rivals.

"She has no faith in the marabout!" squawked one, who had a nose like an eagle's beak.

"She is a liar!" piped another, shaking out

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her silken petticoats as a bird shakes out its plumes.

And then the twitter of fierce laughter rose, shriek on shriek, and was echoed more deeply by the crowd of watching men.

“Give me the scorpions!” cried Halima passionately. “I am not afraid!”

Her desert blood was up. Her fatalism—even in the women of the Sahara it lurks—was awake. In that moment she was ready to die, to silence the bitter laughter of her rivals. It sank away as Sadok grasped the scorpions in his filthy claw, and leaped, gibbering in his beard, upon the terrace.

“Wait!” cried Halima, as he came upon her, holding forth his handful of writhing poison.

Her bosom heaved. Her lustrous eyes, heavy with kohl, shone like those of a beast at bay.

Sadok stood still, with his naked arm outstretched.

“How shall I know that the son of a scorpion will pay me the fifty golden coins? He is poor, though he speaks bravely. He is but a singer in the café of the smokers of the hashish, and cannot buy even a new garment for the close of the feast of Ramadan. How, then, shall I know that the gold will hang from my breasts when to-morrow, at the falling of the sun, I dance before the men of Tougourt?”

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Ben-Abid put his hand beneath his burnous, and brought forth a bag tied at the mouth with cord.

"They are here!" he said.

"The Jews! He has been to the Jews!" cried the desert men.

"Bring a lamp!" said Ben-Abid.

And while Irena and Boria, the Golden Date and the Lotus Flower, held the lights, and the desert men crowded about him with the eyes of wolves that are near to starving, he counted forth the money on the terrace at Halima's feet. And she gazed down at the glittering pieces as one that gazes upon a black fate.

"And now set my brothers upon the maiden," Ben-Abid said to Sadok, gathering up the money, and casting it again into the bag, which he tied once more with the cord.

Halima did not move, but she looked upon the scorpion that was black, and her red lips trembled. Then she closed her hand upon the hedgehog's foot that hung from her golden girdle, and shut her eyes beneath her ebon eyebrows.

"Set my brothers upon her!" said Ben-Abid.

The plunger of the wells sprang upon Halima, opened her scarlet bodice roughly, plunged his claw into her swelling bosom, and withdrew it—empty.

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“Kiss her close, my brothers!” whispered Ben-Abid.

A long murmur, like the growl of the tide upon a shingly beach, arose once more from the crowd. Halima turned about, and went slowly in at her lighted doorway, followed by Irena and Boria. The heavy door of palm was shut behind them. The light was hidden. There was a great silence. It was broken by Sadok's voice screaming in his beard to Ben-Abid, “My money! Give me my money!”

He snatched it with a howl, and went capering forth into the darkness.

.

. When the next night fell upon the desert there was a great crowd assembled in the café of the dancers. The pipers blew into their pipes, and swayed upon their haunches, turning their glittering eyes to and fro to see what man had a mind to press a piece of money upon their well greased foreheads. The dancers came and went, promenading arm in arm upon the earthen floor, or leaping with hands outstretched and fingers fluttering. The Kabyle attendant slipped here and there with the coffee cups, and the wreaths of smoke curled lightly upward towards the wooden roof.

But Halima came not through the open doorway holding the scarlet handkerchiefs above her head.

And presently, late in the night, they laid

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her body in a palanquin, and set the palanquin upon a running camel, and, while the dancers shrilled their lament amid the sands, they bore her away into the darkness of the dunes towards the south and the tents of her own people.

The jackals laughed as she went by.

.

But the hedgehog's foot was left lying upon the floor of her chamber. Not one of the dancers would touch it.

That night I was in the café, and, hearing of all these things from Kouïdah, the boy, I went into the court, and gathered up the trinket which had brought a woman to the great silence. Next day I rode on horseback to Tamacine, asked to see the marabout and told him all the story.

He listened, smiling like the rising sun in an oleograph, and twisting in his huge hands, that were tinted with the henna, the staff with the apple-green ribbons.

When I came to the end I said:

“O, holy marabout, tell me one thing.”

“Allah is just. I listen.”

“If the scorpions had slept with a veiled woman who held the hedgehog's foot, how would it have been? Would the woman have died or lived?”

The marabout did not answer. He looked at me calmly, as at a child who asks questions

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about the mysteries of life which only the old can understand.

“These things,” he said at length, “are hidden from the unbeliever. You are a Roumi. How, then, should you learn such matters?”

“But even the Roumi——”

“In the desert there are mysteries,” continued the marabout, “which even the faithful must not seek to penetrate.”

“Then it is useless to——”

“It is very useless. It is as useless as to try to count the grains of the sand.”

I said no more.

Mohammed El Aïd Ben Ali Tidjani smiled once more, and beckoned to a negro attendant, who ran with a musical box, one of the gifts of the faithful.

“This comes from Paris,” he said, with a spreading complacence.

Then there was within the box a sounding click, and there stole forth a tinkling of Auber’s music to *Masaniello*, “Come o’er the moonlit sea!”

THE DESERT DRUM

I

I AM not naturally superstitious. The Saharaman is. He has many strange beliefs. When one is at close quarters with him, sees him day by day in his home, the great desert, listens to his dramatic tales of desert lights, visions, sounds, one's common-sense is apt to be shaken on its throne. Perhaps it is the influence of the solitude and the wide spaces, of those far horizons of the Sahara where the blue deepens along the edge of the world, that turns even a European mind to an Eastern credulity. Who can tell? The truth is that in the Sahara one can believe what one cannot believe in London. And sometimes circumstances—chance if you like to call it so—steps in, and seems to say, "Your belief is well founded."

Of all the desert superstitions the one which appealed most to my imagination was the superstition of the desert drum. The Saharaman declares that far away from the abodes of men and desert cities, among the everlasting sand dunes, the sharp beating, or dull, distant rolling of a drum sometimes breaks upon the ears of travellers voyaging through the desola-

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tion. They look around, they stare across the flats, they see nothing. But the mysterious music continues. Then, if they be Sahara-bred, they commend themselves to Allah, for they know that some terrible disaster is at hand, that one of them at least is doomed to die.

Often had I heard stories of the catastrophes which were immediately preceded by the beating of the desert drum. One night in the Sahara I was a witness to one which I have never been able to forget.

On an evening of spring, accompanied by a young Arab and a negro, I rode slowly down a low hill of the Sahara, and saw in the sandy cup at my feet the tiny collection of hovels called Sidi-Massarli. I had been in the saddle since dawn, riding over desolate tracks in the heart of the desert. I was hungry, tired, and felt almost like a man hypnotised. The strong air, the clear sky, the everlasting flats devoid of vegetation, empty of humanity, the monotonous motion of my slowly cantering horse—all these things combined to dull my brain and to throw me into a peculiar condition akin to the condition of a man in a trance. At Sidi-Massarli I was to pass the night. I drew rein and looked down on it with lack-lustre eyes.

I saw a small group of palm-trees, guarded by a low wall of baked brown earth, in which were embedded many white bones of dead

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camels. Bleached, grinning heads of camels hung from more than one of the trees, with strings of red pepper and round stones. Beyond the wall of this palm garden, at whose foot was a furrow full of stagnant brownish-yellow water, lay a handful of wretched earthen hovels, with flat roofs of palmwood and low wooden doors. To be exact, I think there were five of them. The Bordj, or Travellers' House, at which I was to be accommodated for the night, stood alone near a tiny source at the edge of a large sand dune, and was a small, earth-coloured building with a pink tiled roof, minute arched windows, and an open stable for the horses and mules. All round the desert rose in humps of sand, melting into stony ground where the saltpetre lay like snow on a wintry world. There were but few signs of life in this place; some stockings drying on the wall of a ruined Arab café, some kids frisking by a heap of sacks, a few pigeons circling about a low square watch-tower, a black donkey brooding on a dust heap. There were some signs of death; carcasses of camels stretched here and there in frantic and fantastic postures, some bleached and smooth, others red and horribly odorous.

The wind blew round this hospitable township of the Sahara, and the yellow light of evening began to glow above it. It seemed to me at that moment the dreariest place in the dreariest dream man had ever had.

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Suddenly my horse neighed loudly. Beyond the village, on the opposite hill, a white Arab charger caracoled, a red cloak gleamed. Another traveller was coming in to his night's rest, and he was a Spahi. I could almost fancy I heard the jingle of his spurs and accoutrements, the creaking of his tall red boots against his high peaked saddle. As he rode down towards the Bordj—by this time, I, too, was on my way—I saw that a long cord hung from his saddle-bow, and that at the end of this cord was a man, trotting heavily in the heavy sand like a creature dogged and weary. We came in to Sidi-Massarli simultaneously, and pulled up at the same moment before the arched door of the Bordj, from which glided a one-eyed swarthy Arab, staring fixedly at me. This was the official keeper of the house. In one hand he held the huge door key, and as I swung myself heavily on the ground I heard him, in Arabic, asking my Arab attendant, D'oud, who I was and where I hailed from.

But such attention as I had to bestow on anything just then was given to the Spahi and his companion. The Spahi was a magnificent man, tall, lithe, bronze-brown and muscular. He looked about thirty-four, and had the face of a desert eagle. His piercing black eyes stared me calmly out of countenance, and he sat on his spirited horse like a statue, waiting patiently till the guardian of the Bordj was ready to attend to him. My gaze travelled

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from him along the cord to the man at its end, and rested there with pity. He, too, was a fine specimen of humanity, a giant, nobly built, with a superbly handsome face, something like that of an undefaced Sphinx. Broad brows sheltered his enormous eyes. His rather thick lips were parted to allow his panting breath to escape, and his dark, almost black skin, was covered with sweat. Drops of sweat coursed down his bare arms and his mighty chest, from which his ragged burnous was drawn partially away. He was evidently of mixed Arab and negro parentage. As he stood by the Spahi's horse, gasping, his face expressed nothing but physical exhaustion. His eyes were bent on the sand, and his arms hung down loosely at his sides. While I looked at him the Spahi suddenly gave a tug at the cord to which he was attached. He moved in nearer to the horse, glanced up at me, held out his hand, and said in a low, musical voice, speaking Arabic:

"Give me a cigarette, Sidi."

I opened my case and gave him one, at the same time diplomatically handing another to the Spahi. Thus we opened our night's acquaintance, an acquaintance which I shall not easily forget.

In the desolation of the Sahara a travelling intimacy is quickly formed. The one-eyed Arab led our horses to the stable, and while my two attendants were inside unpacking the tinned food and the wine I carried with me on

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a mule, I entered into conversation with the Spahi, who spoke French fairly well. He told me that he was on the way to El Arba, a long journey through the desert from Sidi-Massarli, and that his business was to convey there the man at the end of the cord.

"But what is he? A prisoner?" I asked.

"A murderer, monsieur," the Spahi replied calmly.

I looked again at the man, who was wiping the sweat from his face with one huge hand. He smiled and made a gesture of assent.

"Does he understand French?"

"A little."

"And he committed murder?"

"At Tunis. He was a butcher there. He cut a man's throat."

"Why?"

"I don't know, monsieur. Perhaps he was jealous. It is hot in Tunis in the summer. That was five years ago, and ever since he has been in prison."

"And why are you taking him to El Arba?"

"He came from there. He is released, but he is not allowed to live any more in Tunis. Ah, monsieur, he is mad at going, for he loves a dancing-girl, Aïchouch, who dances with the Jewesses in the café by the lake. He wanted even to stay in prison, if only he might remain in Tunis. He never saw her, but he was in the same town, you understand. That was something. All the first day he ran behind my

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horse cursing me for taking him away. But now the sand has got into his throat. He is so tired that he can scarcely run. So he does not curse any more."

The captive giant smiled at me again. Despite his great stature, his powerful and impressive features, he looked, I thought, very gentle and submissive. The story of his passion for Aïchouch, his desire to be near her, even in a prison cell, had appealed to me. I pitied him sincerely.

"What is his name?" I asked.

"M'hammed Bouaziz. Mine is Said."

I was weary with riding and wanted to stretch my legs, and see what was to be seen of Sidi-Massarli ere evening quite closed in, so at this point I lit a cigar and prepared to stroll off.

"Monsieur is going for a walk?" asked the Spahi, fixing his eyes on my cigar.

"Yes."

"I will accompany monsieur,"

"Or monsieur's cigar-case," I thought.

"But that poor fellow," I said, pointing to the murderer. "He is tired out."

"That doesn't matter. He will come with us."

The Spahi jerked the cord and we set out, the murderer creeping over the sand behind us like some exhausted animal.

By this time twilight was falling over the Sahara, a grim twilight, cold and grey. The

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wind was rising. In the night it blew half a gale, but at this hour there was only a strong breeze in which minute sand-grains danced. The murderer's feet were shod with patched slippers, and the sound of these slippers shuffling close behind me made me feel faintly uneasy. The Spahi stared at my cigar so persistently that I was obliged to offer him one. When I had done so, and he had loftily accepted it, I half turned towards the murderer. The Spahi scowled ferociously. I put my cigar-case back into my pocket. It is unwise to offend the powerful if your sympathy lies with the powerless.

Sidi-Massarli was soon explored. It contained a Café Maure, into which I peered. In the coffee niche the embers glowed. One or two ragged Arabs sat hunched upon the earthen divans playing a game of cards. At least I should have my coffee after my tinned dinner. I was turning to go back to the Bordj when the extreme desolation of the desert around, now fading in the shadows of a moonless night, stirred me to a desire. Sidi-Massarli was dreary enough. Still it contained habitations, men. I wished to feel the blank, wild emptiness of this world, so far from the world of civilisation from which I had come, to feel it with intensity. I resolved to mount the low hill down which I had seen the Spahi ride, to descend into the fold of desert beyond it, to pause there a moment, out of sight of the

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hamlet, listen to the breeze, look at the darkening sky, feel the sand-grains stinging my cheeks, shake hands with the Sahara.

But I wanted to shake hands quite alone. I therefore suggested to the Spahi that he should remain in the Café Maure and drink a cup of coffee at my expense.

“And where is monsieur going?”

“Only over that hill for a moment.”

“I will accompany monsieur.”

“But you must be tired. A cup of——”

“I will accompany monsieur.”

In Arab fashion he was establishing a claim upon me. On the morrow, when I was about to depart, he would point out that he had guided me round Sidi-Massarli, had guarded me in my dangerous expedition beyond its fascinations, despite his weariness and hunger. I knew how useless it is to contend with these polite and persistent rascals, so I said no more.

In a few minutes the Spahi, the murderer and I stood in the fold of the sand dunes, and Sidi-Massarli was blotted from our sight.

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II

THE desolation here was complete. All around us lay the dunes, monstrous as still leviathans. Here and there, between their strange, suggestive shapes, under the dark sky one could see the ghastly whiteness of the salt-petre in the arid plains beyond, where the low bushes bent in the chilly breeze. I thought of London—only a few days' journey from me—revelled for a moment in my situation, which, contrary to my expectation, was rather emphasised by the presence of my companions. The gorgeous Spahi, with his scarlet cloak and hood, his musket and sword, his high red leggings, the ragged, sweating captive in his patched burnous, ex-butcher looking, despite his cord emblem of bondage, like reigning Emperor—they were appropriate figures in this desert place. I had just thought this, and was regarding my Sackville Street suit with disgust, when a low, distinct and near sound suddenly rose from behind a sand dune on my left. It was exactly like the dull beating of a tom-tom. The silence preceding it had been intense, for the breeze was as yet too light to make more than the faintest sighing music, and in the gathering darkness this abrupt and gloomy noise produced, I supposed, by some

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hidden nomad, made a very unpleasant, even sinister impression upon me. Instinctively I put my hand on the revolver which was slung at my side in a pouch of gazelle skin. As I did so, I saw the Spahi turn sharply and gaze in the direction of the sound, lifting one hand to his ear.

The low thunder of the instrument, beaten rhythmically and persistently, grew louder and was evidently drawing nearer. The musician must be climbing up the far side of the dune. I had swung round to face him, and expected every moment to see some wild figure appear upon the summit, defining itself against the cold and gloomy sky. But none came. Nevertheless, the noise increased till it was a roar, drew near till it was actually upon us. It seemed to me that I heard the sticks striking the hard, stretched skin furiously, as if some phantom drummer were stealthily encircling us, catching us in a net, a trap of horrible, vicious uproar. Instinctively I threw a questioning, perhaps an appealing, glance at my two companions. The Spahi had dropped his hand from his ear. He stood upright, as if at attention on the parade-ground of Biskra. His face was set—afterwards I told myself it was fatalistic. The murderer, on the other hand, was smiling. I remember the gleam of his big white teeth. Why was he smiling? While I asked myself the question the roar of the tom-tom grew gradually less, as if the man

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beating it were walking rapidly away from us in the direction of Sidi-Massarli. None of us said a word till only a faint, heavy throbbing, like the beating of a heart, I fancied, was audible in the darkness. Then I spoke, as silence fell.

“Who is it?”

“Monsieur, it is no one.”

The Spahi's voice was dry and soft.

“What is it?”

“Monsieur, it is the desert drum. There will be death in Sidi-Massarli to-night.”

I felt myself turn cold. He spoke with such conviction. The murderer was still smiling, and I noticed that the tired look had left him. He stood in an alert attitude, and the sweat had dried on his broad forehead.

“The desert drum?” I repeated.

“Monsieur has not heard of it?”

“Yes, I have heard—but—it can't be. There must have been someone.”

I looked at the white teeth of the murderer, white as the saltpetre which makes winter in the desert.

“I must get back to the Bordj,” I said abruptly.

“I will accompany monsieur.”

The old formula, and this time the voice which spoke it sounded natural. We went forward together. I walked very fast. I wanted to catch up that music, to prove to myself that it was produced by human fists and sticks upon

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an instrument which, however barbarous, had been fashioned by human hands. But we entered Sidi-Massarli in a silence, only broken by the sougling of the wind and the heavy shuffle of the murderer's feet upon the sand.

Outside the Café Maure D'oud was standing with the white hood of his burnous drawn forward over his head; one or two ragged Arabs stood with him.

"They've been playing tom-toms in the village, D'oud?"

"Monsieur asks if——"

"Tom-toms. Can't you understand?"

"Ah! Monsieur is laughing. Tom-toms here! And dancers, too, perhaps! Monsieur thinks there are dancers? Fatma and Khadija and Aïchouch——"

I glanced quickly at the murderer as D'oud mentioned the last name, a name common to many dancers of the East. I think I expected to see upon his face some tremendous expression, a revelation of the soul of the man who had run for one whole day through the sand behind the Spahi's horse, cursing at the end of the cord which dragged him onward from Tunis.

But I only met the gentle smile of eyes so tender, so submissive, that they were as the eyes of a woman who had always been a slave, while the ragged Arabs laughed at the idea of tom-toms in Sidi-Massarli.

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When we reached the Bordj I found that it contained only one good-sized room, quite bare, with stone floor and white walls. Here, upon a deal table, was set forth my repast; the foods I had brought with me, and a red Arab soup served in a gigantic bowl of palmwood. A candle guttered in the glass neck of a bottle, and upon the floor were already spread my gaudy striped quilt, my pillow, and my blanket. The Spahi surveyed these preparations with a deliberate greediness, lingering in the narrow doorway.

I sat down on a bench before the table. My attendants were to eat at the Café Maure.

“Where are you going to sleep?” I asked of D’oud.

“At the Café Maure, monsieur, if monsieur is not afraid to sleep alone. Here is the key. Monsieur can lock himself in. The door is strong.”

I was helping myself to the soup. The rising wind blew up the skirts of the Spahi’s scarlet robe. In the wind—was it imagination?—I seemed to hear some thin, passing echoes of a tom-tom’s beat.

“Come in,” I said to the Spahi. “You shall sup with me to-night, and—and you shall sleep here with me.”

D’oud’s expressive face became sinister. Arabs are almost as jealous as they are vain.

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“But, monsieur, he will sleep in the Café Maure. If monsieur wishes for a companion, I——”

“Come in,” I repeated to the Spahi. “You can sleep here to-night.”

The Spahi stepped over the lintel with a jingling of spurs, a rattling of accoutrements. The murderer stepped in softly after him, drawn by the cord. D’oud began to look as grim as death. He made a ferocious gesture towards the murderer.

“And that man? Monsieur wishes to sleep in the same room with him?”

I heard the sound of the tom-tom above the wail of the wind.

“Yes,” I said.

Why did I wish it? I hardly know. I had no fear for, no desire to protect myself. But I remembered the smile I had seen, the Spahi’s saying, “There will be death in Sidi-Massarli to-night,” and I was resolved that the three men who had heard the desert drum together should not be parted till the morning. D’oud said no more. He waited upon me with his usual diligence, but I could see that he was furiously angry. The Spahi ate ravenously. So did the murderer, who more than once, however, seemed to be dropping to sleep over his food. He was apparently dead tired. As the wind was now become very violent I did not feel disposed to stir out again, and I ordered D’oud to bring us three cups of coffee

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to the Bordj. He cast a vicious look at the Spahi and went out into the darkness. I saw him no more that night. A boy from the Café Maure brought us coffee, cleared the remains of our supper from the table, and presently muttered some Arab salutation, departed, and was lost in the wind.

The murderer was now frankly asleep with his head upon the table, and the Spahi began to blink. I, too, felt very tired, but I had something still to say. Speaking softly, I said to the Spahi:

“That sound we heard to-night——”

“Monsieur?”

“Have you ever heard it before?”

“Never, monsieur. But my brother heard it just before he had a stroke of the sun. He fell dead before his captain beside the wall of Sada. He was a tirailleur.”

“And you think this sound means that death is near?”

“I know it, monsieur. All desert people know it. I was born at Touggourt, and how should I not know?”

“But then one of us——”

I looked from him to the sleeping murderer.

“There will be death in Sidi-Massarli to-night, monsieur. It is the will of Allah. Blessed be Allah.”

I got up, locked the heavy door of the Bordj, and put the key in the inner pocket of

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my coat. As I did so, I fancied I saw the heavy black lids of the murderer's closed eyes flutter for a moment. But I cannot be sure. My head was aching with fatigue. The Spahi, too, looked stupid with sleep. He jerked the cord, the murderer awoke with a start, glanced heavily round, stood up. Pulling him as one would an obstinate dog, the Spahi made him lie down on the bare floor in the corner of the Bordj, ere he himself curled up in the thick quilt which had been rolled up behind his high saddle. I made no protest, but when the Spahi was asleep, his lean brown hand laid upon his sword, his musket under his shaven head, I pushed one of my blankets over to the murderer, who lay looking like a heap of rags against the white wall. He smiled at me gently, as he had smiled when the desert drum was beating, and drew the blanket over his mighty limbs and face.

I did not mean to sleep that night. Tired though I was my brain was so excited that I felt I should not. I blew out the candle without even the thought that it would be necessary to struggle against sleep. And in the darkness I heard for an instant the roar of the wind outside, the heavy breathing of my two strange companions within. For an instant—then it seemed as if a shutter was drawn suddenly over the light in my brain. Blackness filled the room where the thoughts develop, crowd, stir in endless activities. Slumber fell upon

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me like a great stone that strikes a man down to dumbness, to unconsciousness.

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Far in the night I had a dream. I cannot recall it accurately now. I could not recall it even the next morning when I awoke. But in this dream, it seemed to me that fingers felt softly about my heart. I was conscious of their fluttering touch. It was as if I were dead, and as if the doctor laid for a moment his hand upon my heart to convince himself that the pulse of life no longer beat. And this action wove itself naturally into the dream I had. The fingers so soft, so surreptitious, were lifted from my breast, and I sank deeper into the gulf of sleep, below the place of dreams. For I was a tired man that night. At the first breath of dawn I stirred and woke. It was cold. I put out one hand and drew up my quilt. Then I lay still. The wind had sunk. I no longer heard it roaring over the desert. For a moment I hardly remembered where I was, then memory came back and I listened for the deep breathing of the Spahi and the murderer. Even when the wind blew I had heard it. I did not hear it now. I lay there under my quilt for some minutes listening. The silence was intense. Had they gone already, started on their way to El Arba? The Bordj was in darkness, for the windows were very small, and dawn had scarcely begun to

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break outside and had not yet filtered in through the wooden shutters which barred them. I disliked this complete silence, and felt about for the matches I had laid beside the candle before turning in. I could not find them. Someone had moved them, then. The heaviness of sleep had quite left me now, and I remembered clearly all the incidents of the previous evening. The roll of the desert drum sounded again in my ears. I threw off my quilt, got up, and moved softly over the stone floor towards the corner where the murderer had lain down to sleep. I bent down to touch him and touched the stone. They had gone, then! It was strange that I had not been waked by their departure. Besides, I had the key of the door. I thrust my hand into the breast-pocket of my coat which I had worn while I slept. The key was no longer there. Then I remembered my dream and the fingers fluttering round my heart. Stumbling in the blackness I came to the place where the Spahi had lain, stretched out my hands and felt naked flesh. My hands recoiled from it, for it was very cold.

Half-an-hour later the one-eyed Arab who kept the Bordj, roused by my beating upon the door with the butt end of my revolver, came with D'oud to ask what was the matter. The door had to be broken in. This took some time. Long before I could escape, the light of the sun, entering through the little arched

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windows, had illumined the nude corpse of the Spahi, the gaping red wound in his throat, the heap of murderer's rags that lay across his feet.

M'hammed Bouaziz, in the red cloak, the red boots, sword at his side, musket slung over his shoulder, was galloping over the desert on his way to freedom.

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But six months later he was taken at night outside a café by the lake at Tunis. He was gazing through the doorway at a girl who was posturing to the sound of pipes between two rows of Arabs. The light from the café fell upon his face, the dancer uttered a cry.

"M'hammed Bouaziz!"

"Aïchouch!"

The law avenged the Spahi, and this time it was not to prison they led my friend of Sidi-Massarli, but to an open space before a squad of soldiers just when the dawn was breaking.

THE PRINCESS AND THE JEWEL DOCTOR

IN St. Petersburg society there may be met at the present time a certain Russian Princess, who is noted for her beauty, for an ugly defect—she has lost the forefinger of her left hand—and for her extraordinary attachment to the city of Tunis, where she has spent at least three months of each year since 1890—the year in which she suffered the accident that deprived her of a finger. What that accident was, and why she is so passionately attached to Tunis, nobody in Russia seems to know, not even her doting husband, who bows to all her caprices. But two persons could explain the matter—a Tunisian guide named Abdul, and a rather mysterious individual who follows a humble calling in the Rue Ben-Ziad, close to the Tunis bazaars. This latter is the Princess's personal attendant during her yearly visit to Tunis. He accompanies her everywhere, may be seen in the hall of her hotel when she is at home, on the box of her carriage when she drives out, close behind her when she is walking. He is her shadow in Africa. Only when she goes back to Russia does he return to his profession in the Rue Ben-Ziad.

This is the exact history of the accident

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which befell the Princess in 1890. In the spring of that year she arrived one night at Tunis. She had not long been married to an honourable man whom she adored. She was rich, pretty, and popular. Yet her life was clouded by a great fear that sometimes made the darkness of night almost intolerable to her. She dreaded lest the darkness of blindness should come upon her. Both her mother, now dead, and her grandfather had laboured under this defect. They had been born with sight, and had become totally blind ere they reached the age of forty. Princess Danischeff—as we may call her for the purpose of this story—trembled when she thought of their fate, and that it might be hers. Certain books that she read, certain conversations on the subject of heredity that she heard in Petersburg society fed her terror. Occasionally, too, when she stood under a strong light she felt a slight pain in her eyes. She never spoke of her fear, but she fell into a condition of nervous exhaustion that alarmed her husband and her physician. The latter recommended foreign travel as a tonic. The former, who was detained in the capital by political affairs, reluctantly agreed to a separation from his wife. And thus it came about, that, late one night of spring, the Princess and her companion, the elderly Countess de Rosnikoff, arrived in Tunis at the close of a tour in Algeria, and put up at the Hotel Royal.

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The bazaars of Tunis are among the best that exist in the world of bazaars, and, on the morning after her arrival, the Princess was anxious to explore them with her companion. But Madame de Rosnikoff was fatigued by her journey from Constantine. She begged the Princess to go without her, desiring earnestly to be left in her bedroom with a cup of weak tea and a French novel. The Princess, therefore, ordered a guide and set forth to the bazaars.

The guide's name was Abdul. He was a talkative young Eastern, and as he turned with the Princess into the network of tiny alleys that spreads from the Bab-el-bahar to the bazaars, he poured forth a flood of information about the marvels of his native city. The Princess listened idly. That morning she was cruelly pre-occupied. As she stepped out of the hotel into the bright sunshine she had felt a sharp pain in her eyes, and now, though she held over her head a large green parasol, the pain continued. She looked at the light and thought of the darkness that might be coming upon her, and the chatter of Abdul sounded vague in her ears. Presently, however, she was forced to attend to him, for he asked her a direct question.

"To-day they sell jewels by auction near the Mosquée Djama-ez-Zitouna," he said. "Would the gracious Princess like to see the market of the jewels?"

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The Princess put her hand to her eyes and assented in a low voice. Abdul turned out of the sunshine into a narrow alley covered with a wooden roof. It was full of shadows and of squatting men, who held out brown hands to the Princess as she passed. But she was staring at the shadows and did not see the merchants of Goblin Market. Leaving this alley Abdul led her abruptly into a dense crowd of Arabs, who were all talking, gesticulating, and moving hither and thither, apparently under the influence of extreme excitement. Many of them held rings, bracelets, or brooches between their fingers, and some extended palms upon which lay quantities of uncut jewels—turquoises, sapphires, and emeralds. At a little distance a grave man was noting down something in a book. But the Princess scarcely observed the progress of the jewel auction. Her attention had been attracted by an extraordinary figure that stood near her. This was an immensely tall Arab, dressed in a dingy brown robe, and wearing upon his shaven head, which narrowed almost to a point at the back, a red fez with a large black tassel. His claw-like hands were covered with rings and his bony wrists with bracelets. But the attention of the Princess was riveted by his eyes. They were small and bright, and squinted horribly—so horribly, that it was impossible to tell at what he was looking. These eyes gave to his face an expression of diabolic and ruth-

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less vigilance and cunning. He seemed at the same time to be seeing everything and to be gazing definitely at nothing.

"That is Safti, the jewel doctor," murmured Abdul in the ear of the Princess.

"A jewel doctor! What is that?" asked the Princess.

"When you are sick he cures you with jewels."

"And what can he cure?" said the Princess, still looking at Safti, who was now bargaining vociferously with a fat Arab for a piece of milk-white jade.

"All things. I was sick of a fever that comes with the summer. He gave me a stone crushed to a powder, and I was well. He saved from death one of the Bey's sons, who was dying from hijada. And then, too, he has a stone in a ring which can preserve sight to him who is going blind."

The Princess started violently.

"Impossible!" she cried.

"It is true," said Abdul. "It is a green stone—like that."

He pointed to an emerald which an Arab was holding up to the light.

The Princess put her hand to her eyes. They still ached, and her temples were throbbing furiously.

"I cannot stay here," she said. "It is too hot. But——tell the jewel doctor that I wish to visit him. Where does he live?"

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“In a little street, Rue Ben-Ziad, in a little house. But he is rich.” Abdul spread his arms abroad. “When will the gracious Princess——?”

“This afternoon. At—at four o’clock you will take me.”

Abdul spoke to Safti, who turned, squinted horribly at the Princess, and salaamed to her with a curious and contradictory dignity, turning his fingers, covered with jewels, towards the earth.

That afternoon, at four, when the venerable Madame de Rosnikoff was still drinking her weak tea and reading her French novel, the Princess and Abdul stood before the low wooden door of the jewel doctor’s house. Abdul struck upon it, and the terrible physician appeared in the dark aperture, looking all ways with his deformed eyes, which fascinated the Princess. Having ascertained that he could speak a little broken French, like many of the Tunisian Arabs, she bade Abdul wait outside, and entered the hovel of the jewel doctor, who shut close the door behind her.

The room in which she found herself was dark and scented. Faint light from the street filtered in through an aperture in the wall, across which was partially drawn a wooden shutter. Round the room ran a divan covered with straw matting, and Safti now conducted the Princess ceremoniously to this, and handed her a cup of thick coffee, which he took from

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a brass tray that was placed upon a stand. As she sipped the coffee and looked at the pointed head and twisted gaze of Safti, the Princess heard some distant Arab at a street corner singing monotonously a tuneless song, and the scent, the darkness, the reiterated song, and the tall, strange creature standing silently before her gave to her, in their combination, the atmosphere of a dream. She found it difficult to speak, to explain her errand.

At length she said: "You are a doctor? You can cure the sick?"

Safti salaamed.

"With jewels? Is that possible?"

"Jewels are the only medicine," Safti replied, speaking with sudden volubility. "With the ruby I cure madness, with the white jade the disease of the hijada, and with the bloodstone hæmorrhage. I have made a man who was ill of fever wear a topaz, and he arose from bed and walked happily in the street."

"And with an emerald," interrupted the Princess; "have you not preserved sight with an emerald? They told me so."

Safti's expression suddenly became grim and suspicious.

"Who said that?" he asked sharply.

"Abdul. Is it true? Can it be true?"

Her cheeks were flushed. She spoke almost with violence, laying her hand upon his arm. Safti seemed to stare hard into the corners of

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the little room. Perhaps he was really looking at the Princess. At length he said: "It is true."

"I will give any price you ask for it," said the Princess.

"You!" said Safti. "But you——"

Suddenly he lifted his lean hands, took the face of the Princess between them quite gently, and turned it towards the small window. She had begun to tremble. Holding her soft cheeks with his brown fingers, Safti remained motionless for a long time, during which it seemed to the Princess that he was looking away from her at some distant object. She watched his frightful and surreptitious eyes, that never told the truth, she heard the distant Arab's everlasting song, and her dream became a nightmare. At last Safti dropped his hands and said:

"It may be that some day you will need my emerald."

The Princess felt as if at that moment a bullet entered her heart.

"Give it me—give it me!" she cried. "I am rich. I——"

"I do not sell my medicines," Safti answered. "Those who use them must live near me, here in Tunis. When they are healed they give back to me the jewel that has saved them. But you—you live far off."

With the swiftness of a woman the Princess saw that persuasion would be useless. Safti's

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face looked hard as brown wood. She seemed to recover from her emotion, and said quietly:

“At least you will let me see the emerald?”

Safti went to a small bureau that stood at the back of the room, opened one of its drawers with a key which he drew from beneath his dingy robe, lifted a small silver box carefully out, returned to the Princess, and put the box into her hand.

“Open it,” he said.

She obeyed, and took out a very small and antique gold ring, in which was set a rather dull emerald. Safti drew it gently from her, and put it upon the forefinger of her left hand. It was so tiny that it would not pass beyond the joint of the finger, and it looked ugly and odd upon the Princess, who wore many beautiful rings. Now that she saw it she felt the superstition that had sprung from her terror dying within her. Safti, with his crooked eyes, must have read her thought in her face, for he said:

“The Princess is wrong. That medicine could cure her. The one who wears it for three months in each year can never be blind.”

Taking the emerald from her finger, he touched her two eyes with it, and it seemed to the Princess that, as he did so, the pain she felt in them withdrew. Her desire for the jewel instantly returned.

“Let me wear it,” she said, putting forth all her charm to soften the jewel doctor. “Let

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me take it with me to Russia. I will make you rich."

Safti shook his head.

"The Princess may wear it here, in Tunis," he replied. "Not elsewhere."

She began to temporise, hoping to conquer his resistance later.

"I may take it with me now?" she asked.

"At a fee."

"I will pay it."

The jewel doctor went to the door, and called in Abdul. Five minutes later the Princess passed the singing Arab at the corner of the street, Rue Ben-Ziad. She had signed a paper pledging herself to return the emerald to Safti at the end of forty-eight hours, and to pay 125 francs for her possession of it during that time. And she wore the emerald on the forefinger of her left hand.

On the following morning Madame de Rosnikoff said to the Princess:

"I hate Tunis. It has an evil climate. The tea here is too strong, and I feel sure the drains are bad. Last night I was feverish. I am always feverish when I am near bad drains."

The Princess, who had slept well, and had waked with no pain in her eyes, answered these complaints cheerily, made the Countess some tea that was really weak, and drove her out in the sunshine to see Carthage. The Countess did not see it, because there is no longer a Carthage. She went to bed that night in a

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bad humour, and again complained of drains the next morning. This time the Princess did not heed her, for she was thinking of the hour when she must return the emerald to Safti.

"What an ugly ring that is," said the old Countess. "Where did you get it? It is too small. Why do you wear it?"

"I—I bought it in the bazaars," answered the Princess.

"My dear, you wasted your money," said the companion; and she went to bed with another French novel.

That afternoon the Princess implored Safti to sell her the emerald, and as he persistently declined she renewed her lease of it for another forty-eight hours. As she left the jewel doctor's home she did not notice that he spoke some words in a low and eager voice to Abdul, pointing towards her as he did so. Nor did she see the strange bustle of varied life in the street as she walked slowly under the great Moorish arch of the Porte de France. She was deeply thoughtful.

Since she had worn the ugly ring of Safti she had suffered no pain from her eyes, and a strange certainty had gradually come upon her that, while the emerald was in her possession, she would be safe from the terrible disease of which she had so long lived in terror. Yet Safti would not let her have the ring. And she could not live for ever in Tunis. Already she had prolonged her stay abroad, and was due in Russia, where her anxious husband

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awaited her. She knew not what to do. Suddenly an idea occurred to her. It made her flush red and tingle with shame. She glanced up, and saw the lustrous eyes of Abdul fixed intently upon her. As he left her at the door of the hotel he said,

“The Princess will stay long in Tunis?”

“Another week at least, Abdul,” she answered carelessly. “You can go home now. I shall not want you any more to-day.”

And she walked into the hotel without looking at him again. When she was in her room she sent for a list of the steamers sailing daily from Tunis for the different ports of Africa and Europe. Presently she came to the bedside of Madame de Rosnikoff.

“Countess,” she said, “you are no better?”

“How can I be? The drains are bad, and the tea here is too strong.”

“There is a boat that leaves for Sicily at midnight—for Marsala. Shall we go in her?”

The old lady bounded on her pillow.

“Straight on by Italy to Russia?” she cried joyfully.

The Princess nodded. A fierce excitement shone in her pretty eyes, and her little hands were trembling as she looked down at the dull emerald of Safti.

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At eleven o'clock that night the Princess and the Countess got into a carriage, drove to the edge of the huge salt lake by which Tunis lies, and went on board the *Stella d'Italia*.

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The sky was starless. The winds were still, and it was very dark. As the ship glided out from the shore the old Countess hurried below. But the Princess remained on deck, leaning upon the bulwark, and gazing at the fading lights of the city where Safti dwelt. Two flames seemed burning in her heart, a fierce flame of joy, a fierce flame of contempt—of contempt for herself. For was she not a common thief? She looked at Safti's ring on her finger, and flushed scarlet in the darkness. Yet she was joyful, triumphant, as she heard the beating of the ship's heart, and saw the lights of Tunis growing fainter in the distance, and felt the onward movement of the *Stella d'Italia* through the night. She felt herself nearer to Russia with each throb of the machinery. And from Russia she would expiate her sin. From Russia she would compensate Safti for his loss. The lights of Tunis grew fainter. She thought of the open sea.

But suddenly she felt that the ship was slowing down. The engines beat more feebly, then ceased to beat. The ship glided on for a moment in silence, and stopped. A cold fear ran over the Princess. She called to a sailor.

"Why," she said, "why do we stop? Is anything wrong?"

He pointed to some lights on the port side.

"We are off Hammam-Lif, madame," he said. "We are going to lie to for half-an-hour to take in cargo."

To the Princess that half-hour seemed all

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eternity. She remained upon deck, and whenever she heard the splash of oars as a boat drew near, or the guttural sound of an Arab voice, she trembled, and, staring into the blackness, fancied that she saw the tall figure, the pointed head, and the deformed eyes of the jewel doctor. But the minutes passed. The cargo was all got on board. The boats drew off. And once again the ship shuddered as the heart of her began to beat, and the ebon water ran backward from her prow.

Then the Princess was glad. She laid the hand on which shone Safti's emerald upon the bulwark, and gazed towards the sea, turning her back upon the lights of Hammam-Lif. She thought of safety, of Russia. She did not hear a soft step drawing near upon the deck behind her. She did not see the flash of steel descending to the bulwark on which her hand was laid.

But suddenly the horrible cry of a woman in agony rang through the night. It was instantly succeeded by a splash in the water, as a tall figure dived over the vessel's side.

When the sun rose on the following day over the minarets of Tunis the *Stella d'Italia*, with the Princess on board, was far out at sea.

The emerald of Safti was once more in the little house in the Rue Ben-Ziad.

It was still upon the Princess's finger.

THE FIGURE IN THE MIRAGE

ON a windy night of Spring I sat by a great fire that had been built by Moors on a plain of Morocco under the shadow of a white city, and talked with a fellow-countryman, stranger to me till that day. We had met in the morning in a filthy alley of the town, and had forgathered. He was a wanderer for pleasure like myself, and, learning that he was staying in a dreary hostelry haunted by fever, I invited him to dine in my camp, and to pass the night in one of the small peaked tents that served me and my Moorish attendants as home. He consented gladly. Dinner was over—no bad one, for Moors can cook, can even make delicious caramel pudding in desert places—and Mohammed, my stalwart *valet de chambre*, had given us most excellent coffee. Now we smoked by the great fire, looked up at the marvellously bright stars, and told, as is the way of travellers, tales of our wanderings. My companion, whom I took at first to be a rather ironic, sceptical, and by nature unimaginative globe-trotter—he was a hard-looking, iron-grey man of middle-age—related the

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usual tiger story, the time-honoured elephant anecdote, and a couple of snake yarns of no special value, and I was beginning to fear that I should get little entertainment from so prosaic a sportsman, when I chanced to mention the desert.

“ Ah! ” said my guest, taking his pipe from his mouth, “ the desert is the strangest thing in nature, as woman is the strangest thing in human nature. And when you get them together—desert and woman—by Jove! ”

He paused, then he shot a keen glance at me.

“ Ever been in the Sahara? ” he said.

I replied in the affirmative, but added that I had as yet only seen the fringe of it.

“ Biskra, I suppose, ” he rejoined, “ and the nearest oasis, Sidi-Okba, and so on? ”

I nodded. I saw I was in for another tale, and anticipated some history of shooting exploits under the salt mountain of El Outaya.

“ Well, ” he continued, “ I know the Sahara pretty fairly, and about the oddest thing I ever could believe in I heard of and believed in there. ”

“ Something about gazelle? ” I queried.

“ Gazelle? No—a woman! ” he replied..

As he spoke a Moor glided out of the windy darkness, and threw an armful of dry reeds on the fire. The flames flared up vehemently, and I saw that the face of my companion had changed. The hardness of it was smoothed

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away. Some memory, that held its romance, sat with him.

“A woman,” he repeated, knocking the ashes out of his pipe almost sentimentally—“more than that, a French woman of Paris, with the nameless charm, the *chic*, the—— But I’ll tell you. Some years ago three Parisians—a man, his wife, and her unmarried sister, a girl of eighteen, with an angel and a devil in her dark beauty—came to a great resolve. They decided that they were tired of the Francais, sick of the Bois, bored to death with the boulevards, that they wanted to see for themselves the famous French colonies which were for ever being talked about in the Chamber. They determined to travel. No sooner was the determination come to than they were off. Hôtel des Colonies, Marseilles; steamboat, *Le Général Chanzy*; five o’clock on a splendid, sunny afternoon—Algiers, with its terraces, its white villas, its palms, trees, and its Spahis!”

“But——” I began.

He foresaw my objection.

“There were Spahis, and that’s a point of my story. Some fête was on in the town while our Parisians were there. All the African troops were out—Zouaves, chasseurs, tirailleurs. The Governor went in procession to perform some ceremony, and in front of his carriage rode sixteen Spahis—probably got in from that desert camp of theirs near El Ou-

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taya. All this was long before the Tsar visited Paris, and our Parisians had never before seen the dashing Spahis, had only heard of them, of their magnificent horses, their turbans and flowing Arab robes, their gorgeous figures, lustrous eyes, and diabolic horsemanship. You know how they ride? No cavalry to touch them—not even the Cossacks! Well, our French friends were struck. The unmarried sister, more especially, was *bouleversée* by these glorious demons. As they caracoled beneath the balcony on which she was leaning she clapped her little hands, in their white kid gloves, and threw down a shower of roses. The falling flowers frightened the horses. They pranced, bucked, reared. One Spahi—a great fellow, eyes like a desert eagle, grand aquiline profile—on whom three roses had dropped, looked up, saw mademoiselle—call her Valérie—gazing down with her great, bright eyes—they were deuced fine eyes, by Jove!——”

“You’ve seen her?” I asked.

“— and flashed a smile at her with his white teeth. It was his last day in the service. He was in grand spirits. ‘*Mon Dieu! Mais quelles dents!*’ she sang out. Her people laughed at her. The Spahi looked at her again—not smiling. She shrank back on the balcony. Then his place was taken by the Governor—small imperial, *chapeau de forme*, evening dress, landau and pair. Mademoiselle

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was *désolée*. Why couldn't civilised men look like Spahis? Why were all Parisians commonplace? Why—why? Her sister and brother-in-law called her the savage worshipper, and took her down to the café on the terrace to dine. And all through dinner mademoiselle talked of the *beaux* Spahis—in the plural, with a secret reservation in her heart. After Algiers our Parisians went by way of Constantine to Biskra. Now they saw desert for the first time—the curious iron-grey, velvety-brown, and rose-pink mountains; the nomadic Arabs camping in their earth-coloured tents patched with rags; the camels against the skyline; the everlasting sands, broken here and there by the deep green shadows of distant oases, where the close-growing palms, seen from far off, give to the desert almost the effect that clouds give to Cornish waters. At Biskra mademoiselle—oh! what she must have looked like under the mimosa-trees before the Hôtel de l'Oasis!——”

“Then you've seen her,” I began.

“—mademoiselle became enthusiastic again, and, almost before they knew it, her sister and brother-in-law were committed to a desert expedition, were fitted out with a dragoman, tents, mules—the whole show, in fact—and one blazing hot day found themselves out in that sunshine—you know it—with Biskra a green shadow on that sea, the mountains be-

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hind the sulphur springs turning from bronze to black-brown in the distance, and the table flatness of the desert stretching ahead of them to the limits of the world and the judgment day."

My companion paused, took a flaming reed from the fire, put it to his pipe bowl, pulled hard at his pipe—all the time staring straight before him, as if, among the glowing logs, he saw the caravan of the Parisians winding onward across the desert sands. Then he turned to me, sighed, and said:

"You've seen mirage?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Have you noticed that in mirage the things one fancies one sees generally appear in large numbers—buildings crowded as in towns, trees growing together as in woods, men shoulder to shoulder in large companies?"

My experience of mirage in the desert was so, and I acknowledged it.

"Have you ever seen in a mirage a solitary figure?" he continued.

I thought for a moment. Then I replied in the negative.

"No more have I," he said. "And I believe it's a very rare occurrence. Now mark the mirage that showed itself to mademoiselle on the first day of the desert journey of the Parisians. She saw it on the northern verge of the oasis of Sidi-Okba, late in the afternoon. As

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they journeyed Tahar, their dragoman—he had applied for the post, and got it by the desire of mademoiselle, who admired his lithe bearing and gorgeous aplomb—Tahar suddenly pulled up his mule, pointed with his brown hand to the horizon, and said in French:

“‘There is mirage! Look! There is the mirage of the great desert!’

“Our Parisians, filled with excitement, gazed above the pointed ears of their beasts, over the shimmering waste. There, beyond the palms of the oasis, wrapped in a mysterious haze, lay the mirage. They looked at it in silence. Then Mademoiselle cried, in her little bird’s clear voice:

“‘Mirage! But surely he’s real?’

“‘What does mademoiselle see?’ asked Tahar quickly.

“‘Why, a sort of faint landscape, through which a man—an Arab, I suppose—is riding, towards Sidi—what is it?—Sidi-Okba! He’s got something in front of him, hanging across his saddle.’

“Her relations looked at her in amazement.

“‘I only see houses standing on the edge of water,’ said her sister.

“‘And I!’ cried the husband.

“‘Houses and water,’ assented Tahar. ‘It is always so in the mirage of Sidi-Okba.’

“‘I see no houses, no water,’ cried mademoiselle, straining her eyes. ‘The Arab rides fast, like the wind. He is in a hurry. One

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would think he was being pursued. Why, now he's gone!'

"She turned to her companions. They saw still the fairy houses of the mirage standing in the haze on the edge of the fairy water.

"'But,' mademoiselle said impatiently, 'there's nothing at all now—only sand.'

"'Mademoiselle dreams,' said Tahar. 'The mirage is always there.'

"They rode forward. That night they camped near Sidi-Okba. At dinner, while the stars came out, they talked of the mirage, and mademoiselle still insisted that it was a mirage of a horseman bearing something before him on his saddle-bow, and riding as if for life. And Tahar said again:

"'Mademoiselle dreams!'

"As he spoke he looked at her with a mysterious intentness, which she noticed. That night, in her little camp-bed, round which the desert winds blew mildly, she did indeed dream. And her dream was of the magic forms that ride on magic horses through mirage.

"The next day, at dawn, the caravan of the Parisians went on its way, winding farther into the desert. In leaving Sidi-Okba they left behind them the last traces of civilisation—the French man and woman who keep the auberge in the orange garden there. To-day, as they journeyed, a sense of deep mystery flowed upon the heart of mademoiselle. She felt that she was a little cockle-shell of a boat which, ac-

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customed hitherto only to the Seine, now set sail upon a mighty ocean. The fear of the Sahara came upon her."

My companion paused. His face was grave, almost stern.

"And her relations?" I asked. "Did they feel——"

"Haven't an idea what they felt," he answered curtly.

"But how do you know that mademoiselle ——"

"You'll understand at the end of the story. As they journeyed in the sun across the endless flats—for the mountains had vanished now, and nothing broke the level of the sand—mademoiselle's gaiety went from her. Silent was the lively, chattering tongue that knew the jargon of cities, the gossip of the Plage. She was oppressed. Tahar rode close at her side. He seemed to have taken her under his special protection. Far before them rode the attendants, chanting deep love songs in the sun. The sound of those songs seemed like the sound of the great desert singing of its wild and savage love to the heart of mademoiselle. At first her brother-in-law and sister bantered her on her silence, but Tahar stopped them, with a curious authority.

"‘The desert speaks to mademoiselle,’ he said in her hearing. ‘Let her listen.’"

"He watched her continually with his huge eyes, and she did not mind his glance, though

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she began to feel irritated and restless under the observation of her relations.

“Towards noon Tahar again described mirage. As he pointed it out he stared fixedly at mademoiselle.

“The two other Parisians exclaimed that they saw forest trees, a running stream, a veritable oasis, where they longed to rest and eat their *déjeuner*.

“‘And mademoiselle?’ said Tahar. ‘What does she see?’

“She was gazing into the distance. Her face was very pale, and for a moment she did not answer. Then she said:

“‘I see again the Arab bearing the burden before him on the saddle. He is much clearer than yesterday. I can almost see his face——’

“She paused. She was trembling.

“‘But I cannot see what he carries. It seems to float on the wind, like a robe, or a woman’s dress. Ah! *mon Dieu!* how fast he rides!’

“She stared before her as if fascinated, and following with her eyes some rapidly-moving object. Suddenly she shut her eyes.

“‘He’s gone!’ she said.

“‘And now—mademoiselle sees?’ said Tahar.

“She opened her eyes.

“‘Nothing.’

“‘Yet the mirage is still there,’ he said.

“‘Valérie,’ cried her sister, ‘are you mad

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that you see what no one else can see, and cannot see what all else see?"

" 'Am I mad, Tahar?' she said gravely, almost timidly, to the dragoman.

"And the fear of the Sahara came again upon her.

" 'Mademoiselle sees what she must,' he answered. 'The desert speaks to the heart of mademoiselle.'

"That night there was moon. Mademoiselle could not sleep. She lay in her narrow bed and thought of the figure in the mirage, while the moonbeams stole in between the tent pegs to keep her company. She thought of second sight, of phantoms, and of wraiths. Was this riding Arab, whom she alone could see, a phantom of the Sahara, mysteriously accompanying the caravan, and revealing himself to her through the medium of the mirage as if in a magic mirror? She turned restlessly upon her pillow, saw the naughty moonbeams, got up, and went softly to the tent door. All the desert was bathed in light. She gazed out as a mariner gazes out over the sea. She heard jackals yelping in the distance, peevish in their insomnia, and fancied their voices were the voices of desert demons. As she stood there she thought of the figure in the mirage, and wondered if mirage ever rises at night—if, by chance, she might see it now. And, while she stood wondering, far away across the sand there floated up a silvery haze, like

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a veil of spangled tissue—exquisite for a ball robe, she said long after!—and in this haze she saw again the phantom Arab galloping upon his horse. But now he was clear in the moon. Furiously he rode, like a thing demented in a dream, and as he rode he looked back over his shoulder, as if he feared pursuit. Mademoiselle could see his fierce eyes, like the eyes of a desert eagle that stares unwinking at the glaring African sun. He urged on his fleet horse. She could hear now the ceaseless thud of its hoofs upon the hard sand as it drew nearer and nearer. She could see the white foam upon its steaming flanks, and now at last she knew that the burden which the Arab bore across his saddle and supported with his arms was a woman. Her robe flew out upon the wind; her dark, loose hair streamed over the breast of the horseman; her face was hidden against his heart; but mademoiselle saw his face, uttered a cry, and shrank back against the canvas of the tent.

“For it was the face of the Spahi who had ridden in the procession of the Governor—of the Spahi to whom she had thrown the roses from the balcony of Algiers.

“As she cried out the mirage faded, the Arab vanished, the thud of the horse’s hoofs died in her ears, and Tahar, the dragoman, glided round the tent, and stood before her. His eyes gleamed in the moonlight like ebon jewels.

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“‘Hush!’ he whispered, ‘mademoiselle sees the mirage?’

“Mademoiselle could not speak. She stared into the eyes of Tahar, and hers were dilated with wonder.

“He drew nearer to her.

“‘Mademoiselle has seen again the horseman and his burden.’

“She bowed her head. All things seemed dream-like to her. Tahar’s voice was low and monotonous, and sounded far away.

“‘It is fate,’ he said. He paused, gazing upon her.

“‘In the tents they all sleep,’ he murmured. ‘Even the watchman sleeps, for I have given him a powder of hashish, and hashish gives long dreams—long dreams.’

“From beneath his robe he drew a small box, opened it, and showed to mademoiselle a dark brown powder, which he shook into a tiny cup of water.

“‘Mademoiselle shall drink, as the watchman has drunk,’ he said—‘shall drink and dream.’

“He held the cup to her lips, and she, fascinated by his eyes, as by the eyes of a mesmerist, could not disobey him. She swallowed the hashish, swayed, and fell forward into his arms.

“A moment later, across the spaces of the desert, whitened by the moon, rode the figure mademoiselle had seen in the mirage. Upon

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his saddle he bore a dreaming woman. And in the ears of the woman through all the night beat the thunderous music of a horse's hoofs spurning the desert sand. Mademoiselle had taken her place in the vision which she no longer saw."

My companion paused. His pipe had gone out. He did not relight it, but sat looking at me in silence.

"The Spahi?" I asked.

"Had claimed the giver of the roses."

"And Tahar?"

"The shots he fired after the Spahi missed fire. Yet Tahar was a notable shot."

"A strange tale," I said. "How did you come to hear it?"

"A year ago I penetrated very far into the Sahara on a sporting expedition. One day I came upon an encampment of nomads. The story was told me by one of them as we sat in the low doorway of an earth-coloured tent and watched the sun go down."

"Told you by an Arab?"

He shook his head.

"By whom, then?"

"By a woman with a clear little bird's voice, with an angel and a devil in her dark beauty, a woman with the gesture of Paris—the grace, the *diablerie* of Paris."

Light broke on me.

"By mademoiselle!" I exclaimed.

"Pardon," he answered; "by madame."

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“ She was married? ”

“ To the figure in the mirage; and she was content.”

“ Content! ” I cried.

“ Content with her two little dark children dancing before her in the twilight, content when the figure of the mirage galloped at evening across the plain, shouting an Eastern love song, with a gazelle—instead of a woman—slung across his saddle-bow. Did I not say that, as the desert is the strangest thing in nature, so a woman is the strangest thing in human nature? Which heart is most mysterious? ”

“ Its heart? ” I said.

“ Or the heart of mademoiselle? ”

“ I give the palm to the latter.”

“ And I,” he answered, taking off his wide-brimmed hat—“ I gave it when I saluted her as madame before the tent door, out there in the great desert.”

S A F T I ' S S U M M E R D A Y

SAFTI is a respectable, one-eyed married man who lives in a brown earth house in the Sahara Desert. He has a wife and five children, and in winter he works for his living and theirs. When the morning dawns, and the great red sun rises above the rim of the wide and wonderful land which is the only land that Safti knows, he wraps his white burnous around him, pulls his hood up over his closely-shaven head, rolls and lights his cigarette, and sets forth to his equivalent of an office. This is the white arcade of a hotel where unbelieving dogs of travellers come in winter. I am an unbelieving dog of a traveller, and I come there in winter, and Safti comes there for me. I, in fact, am Safti's profession. By me, and others like me, he lives. For a consideration he shows me round the market, which I knew by heart six years ago, and takes me up the mosque tower, from which I gazed over the flying pigeons and the swaying palms when Safti was comparatively young and frisky. Together we visit the gazelles in their pretty garden, and the Caïd's

SAFTI'S SUMMER DAY

Mill, from which one sees the pink and purple mountains of the Aures. We ride to the Sulphur Baths, we drive to Sidi-Okba. We take our *déjeuner* out to the yellow sand dunes, and we sip our coffee among the keef smokers in Hadj's painted café. We listen to the songs of the negro troubadour, and we smile at Algia's dancing when the silver moon comes up and the Kabyle dogs round the nomads' tents begin their serenades. And then I give Safti five francs and my blessing, and he bids me "*Bonne nuit!*" and his ghostly figure is lost in the black shadows of the palm-trees.

Oh, Safti works hard, very hard in winter. The other day I asked him: "Don't you get exhausted, Safti, with all this exertion to keep the Sahara home together? You are getting on in years now."

"Ah yes, Sidi; I am already thirty-two, alas!"

He was thirty-five when I first met him; but he is as clever at subtraction as a London beauty.

"Good heavens! So much! But, then, how can you keep up the wear and tear of this tumultuous life? You must have an iron strength. Such work as you do would break down an American millionaire."

Safti raised his one dark eye piously towards Allah's dwelling.

"Sidi, I must labour for my children. But in the summer, when you and all the travellers

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are gone from the Sahara to your fogs and the darkness of your days, I take my little holiday."

"Your holiday! But is it long enough?"

"It lasts for only five months, Sidi; but it is enough for me. I am strong as the lion."

I gazed at him with an admiration I could not repress. There was, indeed, something of the hero about this simple-minded Saharaman. We were at the edge of the oasis, in a remote place looking towards the quivering mirage which guards dead Okba's tomb. A tiny earthen house, with a flat terrace ending in the jagged bank of the Oued Biskra, was crouched here in the shade. From it emerged a pleasant scent of coffee. Suddenly Safti's bare legs began to "give." I felt it would be cruel to push on farther. We entered the house, seated ourselves luxuriously upon a baked divan of mud, set our slippers on a reed mat, rolled our cigarettes, and commanded our coffee. When a Kabyle boy with a rosebud stuck under his turban had brought it languidly, I said to Safti:

"And now, Safti, tell me how you pass your little holiday."

Safti smiled gently in his beard. He was glad to have this moment of repose.

"Each day is like its brother, Sidi," he responded, gazing out through the low doorway to the shimmering Sahara.

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"Then tell me how you pass a summer day."

The coffee nerved him to this stubborn exertion, and he spoke.

"*Sahah, Sidi.*"

"*Merci.*"

We sipped.

"A day in summer, Sidi, when the great heats begin in June? Well, at five in the morning I get up——"

"And light the fire," I murmured mechanically.

The one eye stared in blank amazement.

"Proceed, Safti. You get up at five. That is very early."

"The sun rises at a quarter to five."

"To call you. Well?"

"I eat three fresh figs, and sometimes four. I then mount upon my mule, and I ride very quietly into Biskra to take coffee with my friends."

"That is half-an-hour's exercise?"

"About half-an-hour. After taking coffee with my friends we play at dominoes. It is forbidden for the Arabs to play at cards in Biskra. I remain in the café at the corner——"

"I know—by the Garden of the Gazelles!"

"—till eleven o'clock, at which time I again mount upon my mule, and return quietly to my home. When I reach there I eat with my wife and children sour milk, bread, and dates from my palm-trees which I have kept from

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the autumn. At twelve we all go to bed together in a black room."

"A black room?"

"We fear the flies."

"I see."

"Till four in the afternoon I, my wife, and my children sleep in the black room. At that hour I rise once more, and go quietly to the Café Maure in old Biskra, near my house. I play cards there for five coffees till seven o'clock. At seven the mosquitoes arrive, and prevent us from playing any more."

"How intrusive! Always at seven?"

"Always at seven. I then walk very quietly with my friends to the end of the oasis."

"To the Tombuctou road?"

"Yes, Sidi; to get the air. We come back by the same road quietly, and I go to my house, and eat a cold kous-kous with my wife and children. After this I return to the café and play ronda till one o'clock."

"One o'clock at night?"

"Yes. At one o'clock I go with my friends very quietly to bathe in the stream beneath the wall near the mosque. We stay in the water for, perhaps, an hour, and when we come out we drink lagmi."

"What's lagmi?"

"Palm wine. Then at three o'clock I go to my home, mount upon the roof quietly with my wife and children, and sleep till dawn."

"And you do this for five months?"

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"For five months, Sidi."

"And—and your wife, Safti?"

I felt that I was very indiscreet; but Safti is good-natured, and has bought quite a number of palm-trees out of his savings when with me.

"My wife, Sidi?"

"What does she do all the time?"

"She remains quietly in my house."

"She never goes out?"

"Never, except upon the roof to take a little air."

"Doesn't she get rather bor——"

The one eye began to look remarkably vague.

"And you find five months of this life a sufficient rest in the course of the year?"

Safti smiled at me with resignation.

"I cannot take more, Sidi; I am not a rich Englishman."

"Well, Safti, you must make the best of your fate. It is the will of Allah that you should toil."

"*Shal-làh!* I will take another coffee, Sidi."

"Larbi!"

I called the Kabyle boy.

SMĀĪN

“When the African is in love he plays upon the pipe.”

SAHARA SAYING.

FAR away in the desert I heard the sound of a flute, pure sound in the pure air, delicate, sometimes almost comic with the comicality of a child who bends women to kisses and to nonsense-words. We had passed through the sandstorm, Safti and I, over the wastes of saltpetre, and come into a land of palm gardens where there was almost breathless calm. The feet of the camels paddled over the soft brown earth of the narrow alleys between the brown earth walls, and we looked down to right and left into the shady enclosed spaces, seamed with water rills, dotted with little pools of pale yellow water, and saw always giant palms, with wrinkled trunks and tufted, deep green foliage, brooding in their squadrons over the dimness they had made. The activity of man might be discerned here in the regularity of the artificial rills, the ordered placing of the trees, each of which, too, stood on its oval hump. But no man was seen; no flat-roofed huts appeared; no robe, pale blue or white, fluttered among the shadows; no dog

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blinked in the golden patches of the sun—only the sound of the flute came to us from some hidden place ceaselessly, wild and romantic, full of an odd coquetry, and of an absurdity that was both uncivilised and touching.

I stopped to listen, and looked round, searching the vistas between the palms.

“Where does it come from?” I asked of Safti.

His one eye blinked languidly.

“From some gardener among the trees. All who dwell in Sidi-Matou are gardeners.”

The persistent flute gave forth a shower of notes that were like drops of water flung softly in our faces.

“He is in love,” added Safti with a slight yawn.

“How do you know?”

“When the African is in love he plays upon the pipe. That is what they say in the Sahara.”

“And you think he is alone under some palm-tree playing for himself?”

“Yes; he is quite alone. If he is much in love he will play all day, and, perhaps, all night too.”

“But she cannot hear him.”

“That does not matter. He plays for his own heart, and his own heart can hear.”

I listened. Since Safti had spoken the music meant more to me. I tried to read the

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player's heart in the endless song it made. Trills, twitterings, grace notes, little runs upward ending in the air—surely it was a boy's heart, and not unhappy.

“It is coming nearer,” I said.

“Yes. Ah, it is Smaïn!”

Safti's one eye is sharp. I had seen no one. But as he spoke a tall youth in a single white garment glided into my view, his eyes bent down, his brown fingers fluttering on a long reed flute covered with red arabesques. His feet were bare, and he moved slowly.

Safti hailed him with the accented violence peculiar to the Arabs. He stopped playing, looked, and smiled all over his young face. In a moment he was on our side of the earth wall, and talking busily, staring at me the while with unabashed curiosity. For few strangers come to Sidi-Amrane, and Smaïn had never wandered far.

“What does he say?” I asked of Safti.

“I tell him we shall be at Touggourt tomorrow night, and shall stay there a week. He answers that his heart is there with Oreïda.”

“What! Does his lady-love live at Touggourt?”

“Yes; she is a dancer.”

Smaïn smiled. He did not understand French, but he knew we were speaking of his love affair, and he was not afflicted with shyness. As he accompanied us to the village he

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played again, and I read his nature in the soft sounds of his flute.

All that day he stayed with us, and nearly all that day he played. Even when he guided me through the village, where, between terraced houses, pretty children—the girls in deep purple, with yellow flowers stuck in their left nostrils, the boys in white—danced with a boisterous grace round brushwood fires, his flute was at his lips, and his fingers fluttered ceaselessly. And as night drew on the music was surely more amorous, and I seemed to see Oreïda drawing near over the sands.

Smaïn was but sixteen, tall and slim as a reed, with a poetic face and lustrous, languid eyes. I imagined Oreïda a child too—one of those flowers of the desert that blossom early and fade ere noontide comes. Sometimes such flowers are very beautiful. As I heard the flute of Smaïn in the pale yellow twilight I knew that Oreïda was beautiful—with one of those exquisite, lithe figures, whose movements make a song; with long, narrow dark eyes, mysterious pools of light and shadow; with thick hair falling loosely round a low, broad forehead; and perfect little hands, made for the dance of the hands that the Bedouin loves so well.

All this I knew from the sound of Smaïn's flute. I told it to Safti, and bade him ask Smaïn if it were not true.

Smaïn's reply was:

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"She is more beautiful than that; she is like the young gazelle, and like the first day after the fast of Ramadan."

Then he played once more while the moon rose over the palm gardens, and Safti, lighting his pipe of keef with tender deliberateness, remarked placidly:

"He would like to come with us to Touggourt and to die there at Oreïda's feet, but his father, Said-ben-Kouïdar, wishes him to remain at Sidi-Matou and to pack dates. He is young, and must obey. Therefore he is sad."

The smoke rose up in a cloud round Smaïn and his flute, and now I thought that, indeed, there was a wild pathos in the music. The moon went up the sky, and threw silver on the palms. The gay cries from the village died down. The gardeners lay upon the earth divans under the palmwood roofs, and slept. And at last Smaïn bade us good-bye. I saw his white figure glide across the great open space that the moon made white as it was. And when the shadows took him I still heard the faint sound of his flute, calling to his heart and to the distant Oreïda through the magical stillness of the night.

The next day we reached Touggourt, and in the evening I went with Safti and the Caïd of the Nomads to the great café of the dancers in the outskirts of the town. At the door Arab soldiers were lounging. The pipes squealed within like souls in torment. In the

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square bonfires were blazing fiercely, and the whole desert seemed to throb with beaten drums. Within the café was a crowd of Arabs, real nomads, some in rags, some richly dressed, all gravely attentive to the dancers, who entered from a court on the left, round which their rooms were built in terraces, and danced in pairs between the broad divans.

"Tell me when Oreïda comes," I said to Safti, while the Caïd spread forth his ample skirts, and turned a cigarette in his immense black fingers.

The dancers came and went. They were amazing trollops, painted until, like the picture of Balzac's madman, they were chaotic, a mere mess of frantic colours. Not for these, I thought, did Smaïn play his flute. The time wore on. I grew drowsy in the keef-laden air, despite the incessant uproar of the pipes. Suddenly I started—Safti had touched me.

"There is Oreïda, Sidi."

I looked, and saw a lonely dancer entering from the court, large, weary, crowned with gold, tufted with feathers, wrinkled, with greedy, fatigued eyes, and hands painted blood-red. She was like an idol in its dotage. Over her spreading bosom streamed multitudes of golden coins, and many jewels shone upon her wrists, her arms, her withered neck. She advanced slowly, as if bored, until she was in the midst of the crowd. Then she wriggled, stretched forth her hands, slowly stamped her

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feet, and promenaded to and fro, occasionally revolving like a child's top that is on the verge of "running down."

"That is not Oreïda," I said to Safti, smiling at his absurd mistake. For this was the oldest and ugliest dancer of them all.

"Indeed, Sidi, it is. Ask the Caïd."

I asked that enormous potentate, who was devouring the withered lady with his eyes. He wagged his head in assent. Just then the dancer paused before us, and thrusting forward her greasy forehead, enveloped us with a sphinx-like smirk. As I hastily pressed a two-franc piece above her eyebrows Safti addressed her animatedly in Arabic. I caught the word "Smaïn." The lady smiled, and made a guttural reply; then, with a somnolent wink at me, she waddled onward, flapping the blood-red hands and stamping heavily upon the earthen floor.

"Smaïn loves that!" I said to Safti.

"Yes, Sidi. Oreïda is famous, and very rich. She has houses and many palm-trees, and she is much respected by the other dancers."

A week later Safti and I were again at Sidi-Matou, on our way homeward through the desert. The moon was at the full now, and when we rode up to the Bordj the open space in front of it, between us and the village, was flooded with delicate light. Against it one tree, which looked like Paderewski grown very

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old, stood up with tousled branches. In the village bonfires flared, and the dark figures of skipping children passed and re-passed before them. We heard youthful cries echoing across the sands. Soon they faded. The lights went out, and the wonderful silence of night in the desert came in to its heritage.

I sat on the edge of an old stone well before the Bordj, while Safti smoked his keef. Near midnight, quivering across the sands, came the faint sound of a flute moving from the village towards the deep obscurity of the palm gardens. I knew that air, those trills, those little runs, those grace notes.

"It is Smaïn," I said to Safti.

"Yes, Sidi. He will play all night alone among the palms. He is in love."

"But with Oreïda! Is it possible?"

"Did he not say that she was like the first day after the fast of Ramadan? When an African says that his heart is big with love."

The flute went on and on, and I said to myself and to the moon, as I had often said before:

"He that is born in the Sahara is an impenetrable mystery."

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I HAD arrived at Inley Abbey that afternoon, and was sitting at dinner with Inley and his pretty wife, whom I had not seen for five years, since the day I was his best man, when we all heard faintly the tolling of a church bell. Lady Inley shook her shoulders in a rather exaggerated shudder.

"Someone dead!" said her husband.

"It's a mistake to build a church in the grounds of a house," Lady Inley said in her clear, drawling soprano voice. "That noise gives me the blues."

"Whom can it be for?" asked Inley.

"Miss Bassett, probably," Lady Inley replied carelessly, helping herself to a bonbon from a little silver dish.

Inley started.

"Miss Sarah Bassett! What makes you think so?"

"Oh, while you were away in town she got ill. Didn't you know?"

"No," said Inley.

I could see that he was moved. His dark, short face had changed suddenly, and he stopped eating his fruit. Lady Inley went on

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crunching the bonbon between her little white teeth with all the enjoyment of a pretty mar-moset.

"Influenza," she said airily. "And then pneumonia. Of course, at her age, you know — By the way, what is her age, Nino?"

"No idea," said Inley shortly.

He was listening to the dim and monotonous sound of the church bell.

Lady Inley turned to me with the childish, confidential movement which men considered one of her many charms.

"Miss Bassett is, or was, one of those funny old spinsters who always look the same and always ridiculous. Dry twigs, you know. One size all the way down. Very little hair, and no emotions. If it weren't for the sake of cats, one would wonder why such people are born. But they're always cat-lovers. I suppose that's why they're so often called old cats."

She uttered a little high-pitched laugh, and got up.

"Don't be too long," she said to me carelessly as I opened the dining-room door for her. "I want to sing 'Ohé Charmette' to you."

"I won't be long," I answered, thinking what exquisite eyes she had.

She turned, and went out in her delicious, thin way. No wonder she had made skeletons the rage in London. When I came back to

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the dinner-table Inley was sitting with both his brown hands clenched on the cloth. His black eyes—inherited from his dead mother, who had been one of the Neapolitan aristocracy—were glittering.

“What is it, Nino?” I asked as I sat down.

We had been such intimate friends that even my five years’ absence abroad had not built up a barrier between us.

“I wonder if it is Miss Bassett?” he said, looking at me earnestly.

“But was she a great friend of yours?” I said. “If Lady Inley’s description of her is accurate, I can hardly imagine so.”

“Vere doesn’t know what she’s saying.”

“Then Miss Bassett——”

“Oh, she does look like that; dried up, unemotional, tame, English, even comic.”

“The regular spinster, eh?”

“She looks it. But, damn it all, Vere has no business to say she has no emotions, to wonder why such people are born. But she doesn’t know—Vere doesn’t know.”

His agitation grew, and was inexplicable to me. But I knew Inley, knew that he was bound to tell me what was on his mind. He could be reserved, but not with me. So I took a cigar, cut the end off it deliberately, struck a match, lighted it, and began to smoke in silence. He followed my example quickly, and then said:

“Vere talks like that, and, but for Miss

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Bassett, Vere would have been murdered two years ago."

I started, and dropped my cigar on the table.

"Murdered!"

"Yes; and I——"

He fixed his eyes on me, and put his hand up to his throat. Nino was half Neapolitan, and I saw a man being hanged. I picked up my cigar with a hand that slightly shook.

"But," I said, "I always thought Lady Inley and you were very happy together."

It sounded banal, even ridiculous, but I hardly knew what to say. I was startled. The tolling of the bell, too, was getting on my nerves.

"One doesn't write such things," he said. "You've been abroad for years."

"It's all right now?"

He nodded.

"I suppose so. Vere has never had the least suspicion."

He drew his chair closer to mine, and was about to go on speaking when the servants came in with the coffee.

"Who's the bell tolling for, Hurst?" he said to the butler.

"I couldn't say, my lord."

When the servants had gone Inley continued, at first in a calmer voice:

"Miss Bassett lived in the red cottage just beyond the gate of the South Lodge from time immemorial. You generally came to us in

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Scotland, I know, but I should think you must have seen her."

Suddenly a recollection flashed upon me—a recollection of a long, flat figure, a drab face, thin hair coming away from a wrinkled forehead under a mushroom hat, flapping, old-fashioned golden earrings.

"Not the person I used to call 'the Plank'?" I said.

"Did you?"

He thought for a moment.

"Yes; I believe you did. I'd forgotten."

"She was always in church twenty minutes before the service began, and always dropped her hymn-book coming out if there were visitors in the Abbey pew!"

"Yes, yes; that's it. Miss Bassett is very nervous in little ways."

"I remember her now perfectly. And you say she——"

I looked at him, and hesitated.

"She saved Vere's life and, indirectly, mine. I'll tell you now we're together again at last. I shall never tell Vere."

He looked towards the windows, across which dark blue silk curtains were drawn, as if he could see the passing-bell swinging in the old square tower. Then he turned to me.

"You know how mad I was about Vere. It's always like that with me. Unless I'm stone I'm fire. After we were married I got even madder. Having her all to myself was

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like enchantment, and in Italy, too, my other native land."

I thought of Lady Inley's eyes.

"I can understand," I said.

"Of course, when we got back it had to be different. Friends came in, and she was run after and admired and written about. You know the publicity of life in modern London."

"City of public-houses and society spies."

"I bore it, because it's supposed to be the thing. And Vere rather likes it, somehow. So I let her have her fun, as long as it was fun. I didn't intend it should ever be anything else."

He frowned. When he did that, and his thick eyebrows nearly met, he looked all Italian.

"We did the usual things—Paris, Ascot, Scotland, and so on—till Vere had to lie up."

"Your boy?"

"Yes; Hugo came along. I was glad when that was over. I thought she was going to die. You knew Seymour Glynd?"

"Life Guards? Killed hunting a year ago?"

Inley nodded.

"He was a great deal with us soon after Hugo's birth. I thought nothing of it. I'd known the fellow all my life. But then one nearly always has."

He laughed bitterly.

"To cut that part short, two years ago in autumn we had Glynd staying with us down

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here for shooting. There were some others, of course—Mrs. Jack, Bobbie Elphinton, and Lady Bobbie—but you know the lot.”

“I did.”

“Ah,” he said, “you’ve been well out of it these years. Well, the shoot was to break up on a Friday, and I’d arranged to go to town that day with the rest. Vere didn’t intend to come. She said she was feeling tired, and was going to have a Friday to Monday rest cure. That’s the thing, you know, nowadays. You get a Swedish *masseuse* down to stay, and go to bed and drink milk. Vere had engaged a *masseuse* to come on the Friday night. On the Thursday, the day before we were all going to town, Glynd hurt his foot getting over a fence into a turnip field—at least I thought so.”

He stopped.

“Everyone thought so, I believe—except, of course, Vere. I wonder if they did, though?” he added moodily. “Or whether I was the only— But what does it matter now? Glynd said he only wanted a couple of days’ rest to be all right again, and asked me if he might stay on at the Abbey till the Monday. Of course I said ‘Yes; if he wouldn’t want a hostess.’ Because Vere said to me, when she heard of it, that she must have her rest cure all the same. Glynd swore he’d be quite happy alone. So he stayed, and the rest of us came up to town on the Friday. Well,

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on the Saturday morning I was walking across the park when I met the Swedish *masseuse* who was to have gone down to Vere on the Friday night. I knew her, because Vere had often had her before in London. 'Hullo!' I said. 'You ought to be down at Inley Abbey with my wife.' 'No, my lord,' she said. 'Why not?' 'I've had a wire from Lady Inley not to go.' 'A wire!' I said. 'When did you get it?' 'On Thursday night, my lord.' 'You mean last night?' I said, thinking Vere must have changed her mind after we had left. 'No,' said the woman; 'on Thursday night, late.' Then I remembered that, after Glynd had hurt his foot and asked to stay, Vere had gone out alone for a drive in her cart, to get a last breath of air before the rest cure. She must have sent the telegram herself then. All of a sudden I seemed to understand a lot of things."

He had let his cigar out, and now he noticed that he had. He tossed it into the fire.

"I said 'Good-morning' to the woman quite quietly, went back to the house, and told my man I shouldn't be at home that night."

He put his hand on my arm.

"I felt perfectly calm. Wasn't that strange?"

I nodded.

"There was a train from town reaching

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Ashdridge Station at nine o'clock at night. I took it. I didn't care to go to Inley Station, where everybody would know me, and wonder what I was up to. I didn't take any luggage. My man asked if he should pack, and I said 'No.' I didn't dine. I was at Paddington three-quarters of an hour before the train was due to start. At last it came in to the platform. Going down I read the evening papers just like any man going home from business. Soon after we got away from London I saw there was rain on the carriage windows. That seemed to me right. We were a little late at Ashdridge. It was still wet, and I had my coat collar turned up. I don't believe they recognised me there. I set out to walk to Inley."

"What did you mean to do?"

"I told you before."

I looked into his face, and believed him. Then I thought of Lady Inley's childish, delicate beauty, of her slightly affected manner, the manner of a woman who has always been spoilt, whose paths have been made very smooth. And here she was living, apparently happily, with a man who had deliberately travelled down in the night to kill her. How ignorant we are!

"You are condemning me," Inley said, with a touch of hot anger.

"I was only thinking——"

"Yes?"

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"That we don't know each other much in the greatest intimacy."

"That's what I thought then."

He said that in a way which suddenly put me on his side. He must have seen the change in my feelings, for he went on, with his former unreserve:

"I walked fast in the dark. I didn't think very much, but I remember that all the trees—there's a lot of woodland, you know, between Ashdridge and Inley—seemed alive. Everything seemed to me to be alive that night. I've never had that sensation before or since."

I realised what the condition of the man had been when he said that, as if I were a doctor and a patient had told me the symptom which put me in possession of his malady.

"When I reached Inley it was late, and the long village street was deserted. There were lights in the inn and in the schoolmaster's house, but there were no people about. I got through without meeting a soul, and came on towards the gates of the Abbey."

"You meant to go into the house?"

"Yes. I was sure—somehow I was sure; but I intended to see before I acted, merely for my own justification. But I was quite sure, as if Vere herself had told me everything. Soon after I had got clear of the village I heard a sound of wheels behind me. I stood up against the hedge, and in a minute or two a fly passed me going slowly. I saw the driver's

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face. It wasn't a man from Inley. Evidently the fly had come from a distance. It was splashed with mud, and the horse looked tired. I followed it till it came to the turning just below Miss Bassett's cottage, where there's a narrow lane going to Charfield through the woods. It went a little way down this lane, and stopped. I waited at the turning. I could see the light from the lamps shining on the wet road, and in the circle of light the driver's breath. He bent down, and I saw him looking at a big silver watch. Then he put it back. But he didn't drive on. I knew what he was waiting for. Vere was going with—with Glynd. That was more than I had ever thought of, that she would go. I put my hand into my pocket, took out my revolver, and went on till I was close to the red cottage. By this time the rain had stopped. I came up to within a few yards of the Abbey gates, stood for a moment, and then returned till I was at the wicket of Miss Bassett's garden. It's bounded by a yew hedge, beyond which there is a path shaded by mulberry-trees. The hedge is low. The path is dark. It was a blackguardly thing to do, but I thought of nothing except myself, my wrong, and how I was to wipe it out. I opened the wicket, came into the path, and stood there under the mulberry-trees behind the hedge. Here I was in cover, and could see the road. I held my revolver in my hand, and waited. It never struck

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me that Miss Bassett might be up. I saw no light in the cottage, and I had a sort of idea that people like her went to bed at about eight. While I was standing there listening I felt something rub against my legs. It made me start. Then I heard a little low noise. I looked down, and there was a great cat holding up its tail and purring. Its pleasure was horrible to me. I pushed it away with my foot, but it came back, bending down its head, arching its back, and pressing against me. I was thinking what to do to get rid of it when I heard a shrill, husky voice call out:

“ ‘Johnny—John-nee!’ ”

“ It was Miss Bassett. I held my breath, and pushed away the cat.

“ ‘Johnny, Johnny—John-nee!’ went the voice again.

“ The cat wouldn’t leave me. God knows why it wished to stay. I was determined to get rid of it, so I put the revolver down on the path, picked the cat up in my arms, and dropped it over the hedge into the road. Just as I had caught up the revolver again I was confronted by Miss Bassett. She had come in slippers up the path in the dark to look for her cat.”

I uttered a slight exclamation.

Inley went on: “ She had a handkerchief tied over her cap and under her chin, and a small lantern in her hands, on which she wore black mittens. I can see her now. We stood

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there on the path for a minute staring at each other without a word. The light from the lantern flickered over the revolver, and I saw Miss Bassett look down at it."

He stopped, poured out a glass of water, and drank it off like a man who has been running.

"Didn't she show surprise—fear?" I asked.

"Not a bit. Women are so extraordinary, even old women who've never been in touch with life, that I'm certain now she understood directly her eyes fell on the revolver."

"What did she do?"

"After a minute she said: 'Lord Inley, I'm looking for my cat. Have you seen him?'"

"'Yes,' I said; 'he's run into the house.'"

"It was a lie, but I wanted her to go in. I had slipped the revolver back into my pocket, and tried to assume a perfectly simple, natural air. I fancied it would be very easy to impose on Miss Bassett when I heard her question. It sounded so innocent, as if the old lady was full of her pet. I even thought, perhaps, she had not known what the revolver was when she looked at it.

"'Did he run into the house?' she said, still looking at me from under her wrinkled eyelids.

"'Yes; when you came out. He was here on the path with me. You called "Johnny!" and he ran off there between the mulberry-trees.'"

"All the time I was speaking to her I had

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an eye to the road, and my ears were listening like an Indian's when he puts his head to the ground to hear the pad of his enemy.

“Miss Bassett stood there quietly for a moment as if she were considering something. She looked prim. I remember that even now—prim as a caricature. It was only a moment, but it seemed to me an hour. ‘If they should come,’ I thought, ‘while she is out here!’ The sweat came out all over my face with impatience—an agony of impatience. I longed to take the old lady by the shoulders, push her into the cottage, lock her in, and be alone, able to watch the bit of road from the Abbey gates to the wicket. But I could do nothing. I was obliged to repress every sign of agitation. It was devilish.”

He got up with a sudden jerk from his chair, and stood by the fire. Even the telling of that moment had set beads of moisture on his square, low forehead.

“At last she spoke again.

“‘I wonder if you'd mind coming in for a minute to help me see if Johnny really is in the house?’ she said.

“I don't know what I should have done—refused, I believe, refused her with an oath, for I began to feel mad; but just at that instant up came the cat once more, purring like fury, and lifting up his tail. He made straight for me, and began to rub himself against my legs again.

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“ ‘Oh!’ said Miss Bassett, ‘there he is! Naughty Johnny, naughty boy! Lord Inley, perhaps you’d be so good as just to lift him up and put him inside the door for me. I always have such a job to get him to come in of a night. He likes hunting in the woods. Doesn’t he, the naughty Johnny?’ ”

“ ‘Now’s my chance to get rid of her!’ I thought.

“ I bent down, picked the cat up, and went along the path towards the cottage, Miss Bassett following close behind me. The cat was an immense beast, awfully heavy, and just as I turned out of the yew path to go up to the cottage door he began struggling to get away, and scratching. I held on to him, but it wasn’t easy, and I got my hand torn before I dropped him down inside the little hall. Away he ran, towards the kitchen, I suppose. Miss Bassett was very grateful, but I cut her gratitude short.

“ ‘Very glad to have been able to help you,’ I said. ‘Good-night.’ ”

“ ‘Good-night, Lord Inley,’ she said.

“ I thought her voice sounded a little bit odd when she said that, and I just glanced at her funny old face, lit up by the lantern she was holding in one mittened hand. She didn’t look at me this time as she had in the garden. Then I went out, and she immediately shut the door.

“ ‘Thank God!’ I thought, and I hurried to

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the wicket. I didn't dare stay in the garden now. Seeing her had made me realise my blackguardism in coming in at all, considering my reason. I resolved to hide in the field at the corner where the road turns off to Charfield. As I opened the wicket, instinctively I put my hand into my pocket for my revolver."

He bent down, looking full into my eyes.

"It wasn't there."

"Miss Bassett!" I exclaimed.

"In a moment I realised that Miss Bassett must have grasped the situation; that her asking me to carry in her cat was a ruse, and that while the beast was struggling between my hands she must have stolen the revolver from behind. I say I knew that, and yet even then, when I thought of her look, her manner, the sort of nervous old thing she was, I couldn't believe what I knew. Then I remembered her voice when she said 'Good-night' to me in the passage, her eyes looking down instead of at me, and that she was only holding the lantern in one hand, whereas in the garden she was using two. She must have had the revolver in her other hand concealed in the folds of her dress. I ran back to the cottage door, and knocked—hard. Not that I thought she'd open. I knew she wouldn't, but she did directly. I could hardly speak. I was afraid of myself just then. At last I said:

"Miss Bassett, you know what I want."

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“ ‘You can’t have it,’ she said, looking straight at me.

“ ‘I kept quiet for a second, then I said:

“ ‘Miss Bassett, I don’t think you know that you’re running into danger.’ For I felt that there was danger for her then if she went against me. She knew it, too, perhaps better than I did. I saw her poor old hands, all blue veins, beginning to tremble.

“ ‘You can’t have it, Lord Inley,’ she repeated.

“ ‘There wasn’t the ghost of a quiver in her voice.

“ ‘I must, I will!’ I said, and I made a movement towards her—a violent movement I know it was.

“ ‘But the old thing stood her ground. Oh, she was a gallant old woman.

“ ‘Do what you like to me,’ she said. ‘I’m old. What does it matter? She’s young.’

“ ‘Then I knew she understood.

“ ‘You’ve seen them together!’ I said. ‘Since I went!’

“ ‘She wouldn’t say. Not a word. I was mad. I forgot decency, everything. I took her. I searched her for the revolver. I searched her roughly—God forgive me. She trembled horribly, but never said a word. It wasn’t on her. She must have hidden it somewhere in that moment when she was alone in the cottage. That was another ruse to keep me searching in there while— But I saw it

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almost directly. I broke away, and rushed out and down the road. Something seemed to tell me they had passed. I got into the lane that leads to Charfield. The fly was gone. Then, all of a sudden, I felt perfectly calm. I turned, and went up to the Abbey gates. I knocked them up at the lodge. The keeper came out. When he saw me he said:

“ ‘ You, my lord! However did you know? ’ ”

“ ‘ Go on! ’ I said. ‘ Know what? ’ ”

“ ‘ About Master Hugo? ’ ”

“ I didn’t say one way or the other. ”

“ ‘ The doctor says it’s a bitter bad quinsy, but there’s just a chance. Her ladyship’s nearly mad. It only came on a few hours ago quite sudden. ’ ”

“ I went up to the Abbey, and found Vere by the child’s bed. She looked flushed, and was breathing hard, as if she had just been running. ”

He stopped, and took out his cigar-case.

“ Running! ” I said.

“ She had parted finally from Glynd in front of Miss Bassett’s cottage, ” he said. “ He told me that afterwards. ”

There was a moment’s silence. Then he spoke more calmly.

“ I went up to town when the child was safe, and had it out with Glynd. They had meant to go that night. It was the boy who stopped her. She took it as a judgment. You know

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how women are. Glynd swore she was stopped in time. You understand?"

"Yes."

"He didn't lie to me."

"And your wife?"

"I never spoke of it to her. I saw her with the boy, and—well, I saw her with the boy, and what she was to him when he was close to death."

His voice went for a moment. Then he added:

"I told her I'd had a presentiment Hugo was ill. She believed me, I think. If not, she's kept her secret."

Just then the dining-room door opened, and Lady Inley put in her pretty head.

"Are you never coming?" she said with her little childish drawl.

I got up, and went towards her.

"By the way, Nino," she added, "the bell was for poor, funny old Miss Bassett. What will her cat do, I wonder?"

As I followed her towards the drawing-room I heard Inley's voice mutter behind me:

"Requiescat in Pace."

PANCRAZIA'S HAIR

ONE autumn I was in Sicily, making a number of mountain excursions, visiting remote villages hidden in rocky clefts, or perched boldly on spurs in the eye of the sun, sleeping occasionally at night in humble rooms to which the gobbling turkey and the audacious pig were no strangers. Among my many memories of those free and happy days one stands out—the memory of a tress of splendid black hair.

On an afternoon, near sunset, I rode up to the edge of a hamlet of huddled dwellings, where stood a large, old church, Arabic-Norman in style, and here I dismounted to rest and fill my eyes and heart with the wonder and the glory of Nature.

As I gazed I remember thinking: “How small humanity is!”

A fat old priest shuffled up to recall me from my reveries. He cleared his throat, saluted me, and begged me to come and see his church.

We went into the sacristy, and presently stood before an immense and mouldy cupboard. After much struggling with a rusty key the doors were opened, and I was con-

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fronted by a large wooden statue of the Madonna and Child, covered with fading but still hideous colours, and flecked with the dust of ages.

I scarcely noticed the statue, however, for my eyes had fallen upon something else—a great plait of glorious black hair, thick, long, twisted with reverent care, strong strand through strand, tied at the top and bottom by bows of rose-red satin. It hung to the wrist of the Madonna, and was touched by the little outstretched foot of the infant Jesus.

I looked inquiringly at the priest.

“That is Pancrazia’s hair, signore.”

“Pancrazia’s hair! Who is, or was, Pancrazia?”

An expression came into the priest’s face that transformed it—a look so human, so tender, even so mystical, that suddenly I loved this old man in his rusty soutane and his wrinkled, patched boots.

I sat down on a wooden box that stood just below the statue, and the priest told me the story of the tress of hair.

I give it in his words, so far as I remember them. But I cannot give the look in his eyes while he was speaking, or the almost childishly beautiful simplicity and sincerity of his manner.

“Pancrazia was never a handsome girl, but always she looked a good girl. And then she had the most beautiful hair in the village, or,

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indeed, in all the country round. When she was a child it was full of gleams of gold, but the underneath was always dark; and, as she grew, the darkness of it crept up, till all over her head the hair was black. Only in the front, by her temples, there remained little feathers of gold, which fell down near her kind, pious eyes—eyes that could be merry, too, and laugh as readily as the eyes of the wicked and the wanton.

“Pancrazia was not one of the melancholy who must cry when they pray. She thought it no wrong to smile at the Madonna; and I have seen her run out of school in the summer days, and blow kisses to the Mother of God—where the shrine is by the gateway of the village—as a child might to her own mother coming down to meet her over the rocks, with, maybe, the little pig trotting alongside. Why not, signore? She had confidence in the Madonna; and what is more beautiful than the confidence which runs out of a young heart like a stream out of a hazel wood? The Madonna loved it, you may be sure.

“As Pancrazia grew up, despite her piety—she was the purest-minded child I ever blessed—the natural feelings grew with her. They come early, signore, in sunny places; and, thank God, the sun is never long away from us here. She began to know there's a life for a maiden that follows after the child's life.

“Ah, signore, I watched over the girl as I

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have watched over a flower growing in my little garden—you must see my little garden, signore, before you go.

“Often I thought: ‘What a mother she will make!’ And sometimes I would run over the boys of the village to choose a husband for her when she should be a bit older. But somehow it always ended the same way: I never could settle on the husband.

“Well, signore, you know what girls are. She didn’t wait for me to choose, though nobody respected me as she did. She didn’t think so much of herself as I thought of her. And while I was saying to myself: ‘Giovanni won’t do, and Stefano won’t do, and Paolo’s not the one, and may the Madonna preserve her from Giorgio!’ she says to herself: ‘Angelo!’ Not a word more, you may be certain. I can hear her say it, and see her lips smiling over the word—‘Angelo!’

“I’d come to him, in my numbering, and I’d said to myself: ‘Angelo won’t quite do.’ Not that he was a bad boy. And he was a handsome one; strong, merry, and could play the guitar and dance the tarantella, and sing ‘O sole mio!’ till you could hear it from Acireale to Capo Sant’ Alessio pretty near. But — Well, in my eyes, nobody would do for Pancrazia.

“In her heart, all the same, she chose Angelo, and it seemed that in his he chose her. When I saw him with her one twilight by the

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shrine at the gateway, and saw her kneel down, while he stood beside her, and crossed himself and looked at her as she was praying—for him, signore, you may be sure, knowing women—I understood how it was, and I said to myself: ‘Perhaps the Madonna has done the numbering too, and stopped at Angelo.’

“And so I left it, trusting all was right for that pure child, even in this world of sin.

“Angelo was a seaman, and was often away. One night when I was in my garden watering my roses—they are worth seeing, as you will know presently, signore—I saw Angelo and Pancrazia coming up to the gate together. I set down the pot of water. Pancrazia was smiling, and he looked brave—you know how a boy of courage looks when he’s just found someone who wants to be taken care of, signore?

“I understood, but I pretended not to, and said innocently: ‘What is it, my children?’

“Then she told me, while he just stared at her, with his eyes getting graver at every word she said. They were going to be husband and wife, and I was the first to know it. Angelo had to go away in the morning to Messina. He’d got a job to sail on an orange boat to the Lipari Islands, and was to be away two months in all. For those two months the secret was to be kept among us three.

“It was Pancrazia’s wish. She didn’t want to face the village talk till Angelo could stay

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beside her. There was always something more retiring about her than about the other girls. It seemed to go with her purity. I blessed them both, and, when I'd finished watering my roses, I prayed for them and for their children.

"Angelo went away in the morning, and Pancrazia kept up bravely. The village folk gossiped and laughed, and spoke of the faithlessness of the men of the sea, but Pancrazia only smiled to herself. And I smiled too. You see, we knew what had been settled, but they, poor, silly souls, were ignorant. Yet, as it turned out, I don't know——"

"Time went on, and one evening, after a month had gone, Pancrazia came rushing into my garden like a mad thing, with a bit of paper in her hand. Angelo was desperately ill with fever far away in Lipari, and the orange boat had had to sail from there and leave him. I scarcely knew Pancrazia. There was a passion in her I'd never suspected, although I know the fires that slumber in us, who are almost the sucking children of Etna, signore, as you might say.

" 'What shall I do? What shall I do?' she kept on crying out.

" 'Pray,' I said. 'Pray, my child, to the Madonna della Rocca.'

"When she left me it was night. Very late I walked out to the wall above the precipice to look at Etna and the stars, and there, beyond

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the gateway, on the stones before the shrine, I saw a figure kneeling, and I heard a little noise of sobbing. I went, and whispered:

“ ‘ You must not cry thus when you pray, Pancrazia. The Madonna will think you doubt her.’ ”

“ Then, signore, the sobbing stopped.

“ A week went by, two weeks, and then came news that Angelo was worse, was dying out there in the islands. That day Pancrazia came again to my house. She was calm, signore, calm, and her face white and still as a pan of milk.

“ ‘ Padre,’ she said, ‘ shut the door.’ ”

“ I shut it.

“ ‘ Padre,’ she said, ‘ I’m going to give something to the Madonna della Rocca, and no one is to know but you. Will you promise never to tell?’ ”

“ I promised solemnly, as she desired.

“ ‘ Come with me to the church now, padre.’ ”

“ I went with her. She had in her hands a length of red ribbon, and there was a scissors hanging at her waist.

“ When we were in the church she shut the door, and said:

“ ‘ Unlock the cupboard in the sacristy, please, padre.’ ”

“ We went into the sacristy, and I unlocked this cupboard, and looked at her.

“ ‘ What is it you are giving to the Madonna, my child?’ I asked.

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"She never said a word, but took the scissors from her waist, and before I could stop her she had cut off her beautiful hair. Not that I would have prevented her; no, signore, but it was her one beauty, except the look of goodness in her face. And somehow it seemed to me that the Madonna would have wished— But she was right. We should keep back nothing. She tied the ribbons as they are now, and hung the hair up there upon the Madonna's hand, and knelt down, and told her that she offered it for Angelo, in the hope that her love of him might be regarded in heaven, and that his life might be spared. That was all.

"She put a shawl over her poor head, and we came out.

"Well, presently there was a fine to-do in the village. When the folk saw Pancrazia's head they stared, and asked, and laughed. And the children pointed, and cried out. And the boys— I beat the boys, signore, and never asked forgiveness. But Pancrazia wouldn't say a word.

"Pancrazia's offering found favour with the Madonna, signore. Her prayer was heard. Angelo recovered, and returned."

The old priest paused. His face was working. The mystical expression I had observed in his eyes was replaced for a moment by a very different look. After a silence he continued:

"No one knew then what we all knew later:

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that he had been nursed back to life—those were Angelo's words, and a lie, *signore*, for his recovery was the miracle of the Madonna—by a woman of the islands, and that already his heart was going out to this stranger. He had come back, though, to keep his word. That I know. But when he saw Pancrazia's poor, shorn head he thought again of the island woman, and——”

The old man coughed, and paused.

“*Signore*,” he resumed in a loud voice, “when Pancrazia saw his look, and that his heart was turned by such a thing, she would not say where, and why, the hair was gone. And I—I had promised. Angelo was but a lad, his passions were hot, the lust of the eye was awake within him, and—God and the Madonna forgive him!—where he should have seen the heart he——”

He paused again.

“*Signore*, he went back to the islands, and married the woman who had nursed him in Lipari.”

“And Pancrazia?” I asked. “Did she not—pardon me if I hurt you—but did she not cease to pray to the Madonna?”

“Cease to pray!” said the old man, and again the mystical look was in his eyes.

He drew out his watch, then softly he whispered:

“Come, *signore*!”

We went out to the wall above the precipice.

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Here there is an old gateway, arching the narrow track by which I had ascended. Just beyond it, under the towering rocks, is a shrine with a crude picture of the Madonna and Child. Now, as the old priest pointed with his finger, I saw on the step before the shrine a plain, dark woman kneeling. A handkerchief was folded over her head, and fell upon her shoulders. Her hands were clasped. Her lips were moving. She was absorbed, and did not see us.

"That is Pancrazia!" whispered the priest. "She has never married. Each day at this hour she comes here. Do you know why?"

"To ask for——"

"She is asking for nothing. She is blessing the Madonna."

"Blessing the Madonna!"

"For having answered her prayer."

"But——"

"Signore, when Pancrazia gave her hair to the Madonna della Rocca she did not think of self. She only asked that her love might be regarded in heaven, and that Angelo's life might be spared. Her prayer was granted. Angelo lives. And each day at this hour Pancrazia comes here to give thanks to God, and to praise and bless the Holy Madonna della Rocca."

I said nothing, but I thought as I watched the praising woman,

"How great humanity is!"

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